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THE LIGHT OF YOGA



·ALICE CHRISTENSEN·

GURU OF THE LIGHT OF YOGA SOCIETY

THE LIGHT OF YOGA

BY · ALICE CHRISTENSEN ·



Shri Swami Rama (1900-1972)

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY GURU, RAMA, WHO KNEW THE REAL MEANING BEHIND EVERYTHING AND WHO TAUGHT ME HOW TO FIND IT.

OTHER BOOKS BY ALICE CHRISTENSEN

- JOY OF CELIBACY – In a study of sex in the American lifestyle, Alice Christensen looks at how advertising and the media shape our outlook on our society. A probing and sometimes humorous analysis of the situation. Her solution to the problem is designed to help us become more aware not only of ourselves but of our environment as well. Illustrated/48 pages.
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- YOGA FOR BEGINNERS – This is a high quality recording by Alice Christensen. She teaches several Yoga exercises on Side One, and on Side Two she teaches meditation by actually putting you into and bringing you out of meditation with beautiful mantric chanting. A most unusual record and an easy way to begin exercise and meditation. The recording comes with a complete exercise brochure. Recording & Brochure $5.95.
- VISHNU'S MAYA – A ½ hour 16 mm color film produced in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities which was photographed entirely on location in Varanasi, India. "Vishnu's Maya" is a cinematic translation of an ancient Indian myth which explains the elusive concept of Maya, one of the most important facets of Eastern philosophy. Written, photographed and directed by Thomas Ball. Original musical score by Ali Azgar Khan.

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THE LIGHT OF YOGA

FOREWORD
By David Rankin

I am Alice Christensen's husband. We were married on the way back from India in January, 1971, where we had been in training with Swami Rama. In the world of Yoga, it is rare for a Yogi of Alice's calibre and stature to be married. Our marriage, however, is not by any standard what one would call ordinary; for you see, she is my wife, and I am her husband, but primarily she is my Guru and I am her disciple. Alice has been my Guru since I first saw her in 1967. Because of her I was able to spend several years of intense training with both her and her magnificent Guru Swami Rama. Of all their students I feel most fortunate to have been able to live in such close proximity to this great Yogic Saint, Swami Rama, and his prime disciple, Alice. It has been at my insistence that this small book, **Light of Yoga**, has been brought back into print — after having been unavailable for several years.

There are many "schools" or "paths" of classical Yoga tradition that date back thousands of years into India's history — such as Hatha, Mantra, Laya, Raja, Karma, Bhakti, Tantra, Advaita, and Kundalini Yoga. The usual and classical approach to Self or God-Realization is through the concentrated and determined efforts of the individual along these various paths or fields of Yogic endeavor. The aspirant seeks out a Guru, a person who has already attained mastery in Yoga, and can transmit the experience and methods of attaining the absolute experience. To the aspirant more often than not, the process of finding a qualified Guru is quite difficult as there just aren't many in the world at any given time. Once having found a qualified Guru, the aspirant must undergo years of systematic and gradual practice of various purification practices and Yogic techniques, as taught by the Guru. Even with a qualified Guru there still is needed tremendous amounts of stamina, strength, fortitude and courage to become established in Yoga.

What we witness here in this story is the very unique and timeless path of the Sahaj Yogi. To me, Alice's initiation into this ancient path of Yoga is especially unusual because Alice did not come from India, nor was she raised in a Brahmin family as Rama was, nor was she spoon-fed the philosophy and concepts of India. In fact, she was raised in a climate about as far removed as one could be from the "light of Yoga." Yet, from within the being of this midwestern housewife in Willoughby, Ohio, in 1952, in the "desert of mysticism" (as she used to call it) there burst forth a series of mystical Yogic experiences that literally absorbed her. At first she fought it, thinking that she was going insane. Great Yogis such as Babaji and Swami Sivananda appeared to her in full consciousness, sometimes right while she was washing dishes. Like a king returning to recapture lands that once belonged to his ancestors, the Yoga took over Alice's life, leading her to Swami Rama, to India and the classical path of Sahaj Yoga. At no time did she seek Yoga as is customary, but rather it came forward and enveloped her. This is the classic manner of Sahaj. Few people enter Yoga in this manner, yet this was the initiation that led Alice around the world and has placed her in the strange position of being one of the finest Yogis in the world today.

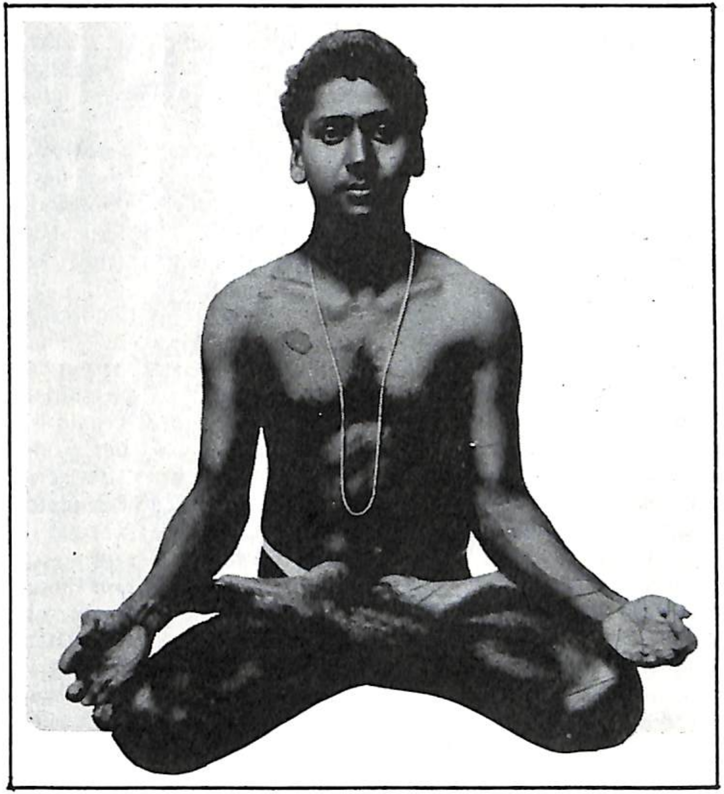
Sahaj Yoga, as Swami Rama taught, is a divine Yoga that takes place in only a few people in a span of time. It is a type of Yoga wherein one is so close to the Divine that the Divine literally flows into and through the personality, sometimes against the will of the individual. Great teachers such as Shankaracharya, Yukteswar, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, and Swami Rama are just a few examples of such great souls.

Most of us are not so lucky as these great souls who have such a link, faith and vivid experience of the Divine moving in and through them. For the bulk of humanity, these great Yogis have developed specific paths and inward roadways that all lead to the same divine substance and experience. No matter how clear the path, however, it still takes a great deal of personal tenacity, courage, stamina, heart, soul and effort to "raise ourselves by ourselves" to the threshold of Divinity. The distinguishing characteristic of the Sahaj Yogi is that the individual does not seem to have to make this herculean effort just to stay on the path; but rather God actually forces the person into the right situation or experience often against great opposition from the student. It is a strange path of Yoga that I doubt many people can truly understand unless actively engaged in it themselves.

I do not mean to say, however, that there is no personal effort exerted by the individual in Sahaj Yoga. It is just that it is of a very different type. The difference is that most of us "do Yoga", but in Sahaj, the Yoga "does you". Spontaneously, complicated practices, concepts, and profound experiences spring forth. One need only examine the lives of great Yogis to see many examples of this behavior. The life of Ramakrishna was extremely paradoxical as he often did things that were frowned upon by the local religious community; yet Ramakrishna was driven, compelled and moved by the Mother to do complicated and ancient Yogic practices that few people know.

Rama told me, "The Sahaj Yogi is led spontaneously in Yoga practice. Powers, complicated practices and many other visionary and wonderful experiences spring out of their own volition as directed from some high realm of Being. The Yogi is often confused and perplexed at what is occuring. Sometimes he or she even tries to fight it or throw it off, but the Divine just waits patiently for these flutterings to subside and then continues on its way. Many great saints such as Shankara-

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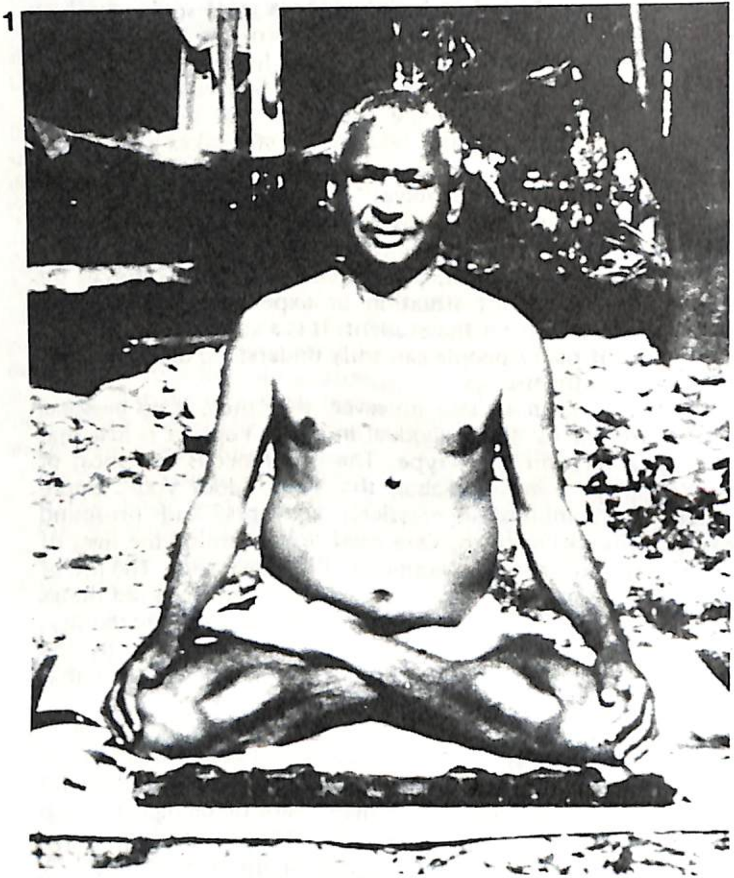
•Photo (1) Swami Rama in his early 20's.

charya and Ramakrishna exhibited this strange spontaneous Yogic behavior."

Swami Rama, Alice's Guru, is another example of a Sahaj Yogi. In his early twenties, he had a divine vision of God that moved him to quit his job as a young factory engineer and leave for the Himalayas where he practiced and mastered all the eight limbs of Yoga in less than a decade! Rama was compelled, moved from within to take up the rigorous course of Yoga that he followed. He had no physical Guru; instead, Lord Shiva, the timeless and classic King of Yogis, appeared to him some 18 times in his life giving him pertinent instruction in the complicated higher realms of Yoga.

As Rama said, "For me this was natural. I could do nothing else. My every thought and move was directed from this inner being. The things I did I had never heard about or seen anyone do before, although years after accomplishing the siddhi (power) of a particular practice, I would find it described in some ancient book on Yoga. Some of the things I did spontaneously would kill another, yet to me they were strangely familiar and natural." One such instance was Rama's complete mastery of the process called Dhristi Yoga (Tratak), the fixing of the gaze. "I had followed the staring process, as inspired from within, but my capacity grew beyond these methods and I felt an urge to push beyond these normal powers. I was living in a cave above where Maharishi now has an ashram. This was in the early 1930's. Every morning I would go down to the Ganges at the bend where it flows through Rishikesh. I would find a slab of stone submerged in the water where I would immerse myself chest deep. Then I would fix my gaze upon the center of the morning sun as it rose over the mountain peaks between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. I would stare unblinking, unmoving for the next 3 to 4 hours following the sun as it slowly climbed overhead. Eventually about noon it would pass overhead. As I did not move my

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•Photo (1) Swami Rama in Padmasan during a 3-month fast on nheem juice and milk, 1972; (2) Swami Rama's eyes were compelling.

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head, just my eyes, the eyes would be riveted between the eyebrows as the sun passed overhead. The accomplishment of this practice allows one to actually see the Divine fully in all of its manifestations. The side effect was that it completely cured my eyesight of all weakness although every member of my family has had to wear glasses from the teens."

"But Rama," I exhorted, "isn't such a thing supposed to cause blindness and damage the retina?" He laughed and said, "Yes, boy, it is and it will if done in any way but the correct way."

"What is the correct way?"

"That must come from within when your consciousness and the consciousness of light are so similar that there exists no real difference . . . then no harm can occur."

The value of a qualified Guru must not be understated in any path of Yoga. Once Alice was undergoing specific Yogic Kriya technique where one swallows 7–9 yards of treated gauze systematically over a period of 21 days while fasting. This process cleanses the body of excess phlegm and purifies the nervous system. Toward the end of the fast and practice, Alice was having a cup of tea with Rama and said, "Swamiji, I am feeling an urge to perform Kechari Mudra (a practice of bringing on a state of samadhi by laying the tongue back in the throat and up into the nasal passage where the tongue then

presses lightly on the base of the skull, thus altering consciousness.) Will you teach me this technique?"

"Why do you want to do such things? Don't you know . . I have already done all that for you. You needn't go through all those practices. Just do a few asans and pranayamas, do your japa and meditation and don't strain much now . . . you will go like a bullet."

The value of a Guru goes beyond the normal range of practice in that the Guru is the one who initiates one into the higher realms of Yoga. A story illustrating this, in addition to those in Alice's book, is one that Alice and Rama often told me. When she first met Rama in 1964, she had already been practicing for a number of years. The first time she sat in meditation with Rama was in the home of some theosophists. "I was sitting in a chair, comfortable and quiet. Rama said, 'Now make yourselves comfortable . . . don't strain in any way. Just relax and be still and I am going to sing a few Om's. . you just listen to my singing of Om and relax when I finish. Be still and empty the mind.' At that we all closed our eyes. I did so. I wasn't expecting anything. Although I had had so many visionary experiences, I had never sat in meditation with a Yogi like Rama physically present. So I just relaxed and awaited his Om. I was sitting near a corner of the crowded room yet I could hear him inhale in preparation for his Om. Oddly enough, at the first vibration of his Om I began to feel an odd sensation in my groin like a quivering. It began to increase rapidly. I was totally unprepared as it happened so fast that it caught me off guard. Suddenly, I don't know whether it was his second Om or still the first, but a quick burst of energy moved up my spinal column straightening my back up in the chair so that I sat free of the chair back. This was followed almost immediately by a much stronger burst that came up my spine with the rushing sound of wind in a tunnel. It smashed up into my head like a Fourth of July finale. I felt my body rise out of the chair and literally sail backward and to the side, head over heels into the corner of the room five feet away. I landed with a thud that must have shaken the room. I was in a very strange state, suddenly finding myself in disarray crumpled in the corner. I opened my eyes to find myself weeping; yet I was neither sad nor happy, just extremely embarrassed and perplexed. Everyone was trying to maintain his composure but all eyes were squinting open looking at the commotion. I was very embarrassed as I was still in an awkward position scrambling for my chair. Rama simply sat like a stone unmoving. Rama began to sing just after I got my seat set up again. I felt like I had ruined everyone's meditation. I was crying and trying to hide it at the same time. Rama went around the room questioning the others about their meditative experience, but avoided me. If he hadn't, I probably would have fainted. Afterward, when people were mingling, I managed to maneuver Rama into a corner privately and with tears in my eyes said, 'Rama . . .what . . ' He looked into my eyes and said, 'Yes Alice . . . I see that all the channels are completely open.' Suddenly someone broke in and I slunk into a chair in the corner struggling to gain my composure. Channels? What channels were open? It wasn't until months later that I began to understand what he meant."

As you read on, you will see before you the massive experience that burst forth in Alice's life. This force of Yoga came forward and completely absorbed her. She didn't go looking for it, rather it came looking for her. In Alice's case, the ancient lines from the Upanishads, "When the student is ready, the Guru appears" had become a reality of immense proportions.

While reading this, one must keep in mind that most of these initial experiences happened to Alice 25 years ago. In the beginning Alice never consciously sought out this life of Yoga as most of us do. Yet in the past 25 years she has become, through the Grace of her Guru Rama, one of the finest Yogis in the world today. The stories of Yogi's lives are a great

inspiration to those of us struggling to make sense of reality through the subtle and potent practices of Yoga. This is the story of such a Yogi, Alice, and how God came looking for her, found her and reclaimed her as His own.

With two or three exceptions, the photographs shown herein were taken after the initial period of Alice's training. I have included them to help give you a feeling for the subject matter and setting. The book itself was compiled by Alice from letters, notes, and remembrances. She initially put these together in a very short time for the use of some of her first students. Because of the short preparation time of the original manuscript, some of the sentence structure and wording is in a rather simplified form. I have purposely left much of it in this initial form for I feel it gives the reader an emotional awareness of Alice's inner being at the time the experiences occurred. I also feel it gives a more intimate glimpse into the inner workings of a person undergoing the tremendous psychic and spiritual transformation, to say nothing of the physical changes, that Alice went through.

Having read and reread, in the past nine years, this diary-like account of Alice's, I never cease to be amazed and thrilled to witness the magnitude and depth of this great American Yogini. I hope you also may see some of yourself in this story. "May the Light of Yoga illumine your life."

David Rankin
Head of Teaching Instruction
The Light of Yoga Society

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•Photo (1) Alice and her husband David Rankin standing at the top of Pissughat, 12000 ft. above sea level, on a pilgrimage to the holy cave of Amarnath in Kashmir 1974.



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Perhaps no one really knows what prompts a person to sit down to write, except for the vague feeling that it somehow seems necessary. How is the decision made? And Who, or what, is being expressed? In the practice of Yoga, where the question of ego is so important, this is a big point.

This is the story of how Yoga bloomed in my life, taking complete control of me: the story of its effect upon the lives of my family and others surrounding me; the changes in my own life, and how it has changed me now that the initial attack is over. I call it an "attack", for that is what it was, yet, not in the sense of something to be avoided if possible. This kind of attack is a more subtle thing – the kind of thing we notice so strongly once in awhile and are so frightened by it that we try to put it out of our minds – such as a sudden awareness of evolution or the passing of time. But I am no longer frightened, and it is time to tell the story.

THE VISION

One warm summer night in 1952, I went to bed at my usual time, with no thoughts to bother me except perhaps the ordinary things a busy housewife might have on her mind, and promptly fell asleep. I awoke in the middle of the night to see a huge column of light at the foot of the bed. It filled the room with its tremendous radiance. I could only remember seeing light such as this when power lines were down after a storm, flashing as they whipped and grounded themselves. The light had no shape that I could see, but it was rapidly coming closer to me. In terror I pulled myself up against the backboard hoping to wake my husband with a scream or something, but I seemed to have no will of my own. I could not speak or move my arms or legs. Finally I gave myself up to seeing this thing – whatever it was – advance on me. I knew I was not dreaming because I could see the green branches of the maple tree. outside the window, blowing and swaying in the soft, summer breeze, and the curtains billowing gently in the same breeze. I watched, suddenly very quiet, and waited for whatever was to happen. The light advanced upon me and gradually began to cover me and enter my body. I knew nothing after that and awoke in the morning in a perfectly natural state.

That morning, I thought back over the whole thing and wondered if I had fainted from fear, and then wondered if it had not been just a dream. You can never tell about dreams, but I remember feeling my arms and legs and thinking, *"Well I'm still here and it's morning and that was a real dilly of a something or other."* But, as I put my feet on the floor and started to dress, the word "Yoga" sprang into my mind. I brushed my teeth and thought about Yoga; I went to fix breakfast for my family and I thought about Yoga; Yoga filled my mind. Why, I wondered; I had never even heard the word except at a county fair long ago where a turbaned man claimed he could tell the future for a small sum. Once before in my life, I could remember feeling this way. Heavily drugged after the birth of a child born dead, my mind was functioning in a far-off way, but my body would not respond. I could feel the same kind of push of this crazy word – Yoga– in my mind.

My family came to breakfast and the children went to school and it seemed like an ordinary day. However, when my husband lingered over his coffee and paper, I felt that I had to tell him exactly what had happened or my head would burst. So I told him. He put his paper down and suggested that perhaps I needed a good psychiatrist, and with a few more funny remarks along this line, we dropped it – he to

•Photo (1) Alice Christensen in a pensive, abstract mood, 1974.

go his way and I to mine. But my way was the impulse of Yoga. It didn't change; it stayed on and on.

At first it did not push me too much. It came up during bridge parties and dancing. When I encountered people who seemed to have some interest in the matter, I would approach the subject gently. I had never had any regular religious affiliation in my youth, and when I married I became a member of the Unitarian Church in Cleveland. Whenever I talked to any of my fellow members I would bring up the subject much in the same way as with other groups, and I found that no one really knew too much about it. I did find that the "side-show" theory was strong and that there was no qualified person in the area who could talk to me on the subject.

Life went on pretty much as usual except for the push of the word "Yoga" in the back of my mind. Suddenly one day realization came to me that I was beginning to know what would happen before it happened. It seemed such a crazy thing that I thought it must be just a happy chance of some sort; I was wrong.

I began to live in the brilliant world of the clairvoyant. Visions came from every side – mind transference and future happenings, people coming to me in dreams and in hallucinations that told me all kinds of things concerning the life I led, what was to come, and most of all – about Yoga.

By this time I had read everything I could get my hands on in every library near our little town of Willoughby, Ohio, and had even gone into Cleveland where the superb White Collection was. My name was on every waiting list for the few books on Yoga that were available; however, the best books on the mystical sciences of the East were in German and Sanskrit and I knew neither of these languages. Inadequacy filled me as I looked in vain for someone to tell me what to do – how to start – where to begin – how to deal with this crazy world that had burst upon me. I know now that the talk of experiences with LSD throwing one into a world of altered consciousness is exactly what was happening to me at that time.

My husband was most upset by this unreal thing which seemed to be controlling me. I began to look rather tense and strained and we made plans to go to Niagara Falls with some friends for the weekend. My boys were happy about it and we made plans for a lovely time of just resting. The day came, and we made reservations at a lovely place where a little garden terrace sheltered by a stone wall adjoined the bedrooms. We spent a wonderful day and all went to sleep that night in a happy state of tiredness and sun.

Something woke me about 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. As I looked about, I could see a strange-looking man trying the lock of the screen on our little patio. He stood there talking madly to me, telling me to hurry and unlock the screen because he did not have much time. I gave him one look, picked up the phone near the bed and called the desk. I said that some man was trying to break into our room and to send the police at once. They did, but I must say that they should have been quicker, because before I laid the phone down the man started to dissolve into a misty substance and, smiling his farewell, he disappeared completely from sight. Soon hotel people were swarming all over the patio and our room and I had to stand there, knowing exactly what had happened yet not able to tell anyone. My husband awoke from a sound sleep to find a room full of people literally beating the bushes outside. After I partially explained, we both decided that the time had come for me to see a good psychiatrist. Needless to say we did not enjoy our trip much after this. After we returned home, I made an appointment to see a doctor. After spending a few weeks with him, oddly enough he sent me home with the information that what had happened to me happens to quite a few people, and was more ordinary than I would think. His main point was that people in our society seldom talk about

things like this as they do not fit into "normal" daily patterns. He seemed to feel that there was very little bothering me and, unless I wanted to go into long analysis to find the cause of this particular thing, there was no reason to see him anymore.

In those days I desperately tried to find someone to talk to me about Yoga. I wrote everyone who had ever written a book on the subject. I made a methodical search of every library in every town I visited. I called any name in any phone book. I went everywhere that sounded as if it had anything to do with Yoga. I wrote to a Yoga institute in New York; I had letters returned – *"Address Unknown"*. (I knew it was there!) I wrote to a man in Canada – Vishnudevananda. The letter came back – unknown. I know he is there now, he was a student of Sivananda's. Never did I meet a group of people practicing the occult arts. I find now that they are everywhere and were then too. Ernest Wood, that fine author of Yoga books, was notorious for answering every letter that he ever got, but he did not answer mine.

After awhile, I began to realize that I was being kept alone. I fought it, but then I gave up the struggle, and now I see how much better I was for it. I had very specific guidance when my mind was in a very shaky, formative state. Any false word would have sent me scurrying off in the wrong direction. My time was very carefully planned for me. I know it now.

Now, of course, I meet everyone who knows anything about Yoga and I remain the same; always the same. I am just what I am.

REALIZATION

I settled down at home then, to a world of vision and color that I had never seen before. But things got worse. Many times I would sit on chairs that weren't there, and, of course, hit the floor. Seeing people in a room I would very craftily make sure that everyone else saw them too before I talked to them. Understanding came to me of the Zen quote, that *"before one studies the self, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers – then one gets a glimpse – then mountains are no longer mountains and rivers are no longer rivers – then after some practice mountains are again mountains and rivers are rivers again."* My trouble came from being in the middle; nothing much made sense to me. On top of that, the terrible push of the study of Yoga kept my mind busy day and night. But worst of all was the insistence of my husband that I was insane. Neither of us was ever free from this thought.

One man appeared in these visions more and more often. Sometimes in dreams I would see him earnestly talking to me and would awake trying to remember what he had said. Then he came more and more during the day. He would appear next to me when I was doing the dishes. At first, I felt such terror that I thought I would pass out. Eventually I became braver about the whole thing and even began to watch for him. I got so involved in watching for him that I guess it began to show in quite a few ways. Arthritis in my hands made me miserable at that time so we decided that a few days in Florida with my parents might do me some good. I left with my younger son and it was arranged that the rest of the family would meet me in a week or two. In a strange sort of way I think something in the back of my mind felt that perhaps this man that I was seeing in visions would stay in the house, or that perhaps he just manifested there, and was part of it. At any rate, I left and my parents met us at the airport. The sun was so nice, my parents looked so brown and calm, and I took a deep breath. I remember thinking, as we crossed the beautiful Sunshine Skyway Bridge in Tampa, that everything was so easy and all would be right now.

When we arrived at the house I was talking and laughing like my old self, but when I walked into the bedroom to put my luggage down – there on the dresser in my room sat my man. It would be nice to say: *"There sat my little man."* However, this has the connotation of my being a little under the weather, and perhaps a little alcoholic; not seriously, but just enough to not communicate well. All wrong. This was not a little man; oddly, he was quite large. He smiled at me in the same way I had seen all winter and this time I talked madly, openly, not caring who heard me. *"Please go away. You don't fit into my life. I don't want you. I don't know why you are here."* Eventually I realized I was becoming quite incoherent. He smiled and disappeared.

I guess it was at this time that I finally began to feel the silence begin to grow in me. There was no more flurry to escape or explain. Acceptance is a strange thing. Suddenly I knew that I was not insane, and, because I had nowhere to go, I would have to face this in the best way I could. Probably it was the fight against this feeling of silence that gave me this last flurry. It was something I sensed and it scared me. Everything I was seemed threatened by it and I was fascinated and repelled at the same time. The realization was complete now. It had toyed with me long enough and, finally, just as I had thought I had run away from it, it caught up with me, engulfed me, and laughed.

Our vacation was nice. No one mentioned Yoga at all, and I got brown and rested. My family all watched me quietly and breathed a sigh of relief. There was vague talk of how high-strung people take a little more time than others to adjust and how good sunshine is for "people". We left Florida happy and ready to return to work. However, I sensed within myself the feeling that I would return to deep study and work in what had overtaken my life. I had put up a fight and had lost, but somehow I was happy about it – maybe with just having the fight over.



•Photo (1) Alice's visionary teacher Swami Sivananda, Sage of the Himalayas.

I went at it hard when I got home. I set definite times for reading and studying. I sat a couple of hours a day studying the postures and exercises that I found formed the basis of Hatha Yoga, which is the school primarily concerned with exercise. All the books that I was able to obtain pointed out that it was impossible to really study without a teacher, also adding – in the quizzical way of Yogic thought – that *"When the student is ready, the guru comes."* I read a little further and found these books also said that *"One gets the teacher one deserves,"* but by this time nothing could frighten me too much, and in my ignorance I pressed on. I know that if anyone reads this who has children, work, etc., to keep them busy, the first thing they will think is that all else was neglected in the desire to learn. I had no trouble with this. I kept a ten room house, made my own bread, sewed my own clothes, and took good care of my family. Yoga gave me tremendous concentration, and I sometimes used to practice by cooking five recipes at once, both hot and cold, and have them come out right at their different temperatures, all at the same time. I found myself doing things better than ever before. I became very efficient and sorted out all the things in my life that I felt were not necessary. I settled down to concentrate on what had meaning for me and for those around me.

Probably the most wonderful thing about it was that I became well. All my life I had suffered along half-sick and the idea of being well was a totally new concept. Now I know that everything is a concept, even life itself – but we won't go into that now.

Then, one day the man appeared again and began to talk. Having become quite brave by then, I listened instead of trembling, and my Yoga lessons began in earnest. I would bow; he would bow; and the lesson would begin for the day. Progress came rapidly. My neighbor, who was a dear friend, was very careful not to disturb me in the three hours in the afternoon set aside for meditation. (If some of the terms used are not familiar, you can find them in any basic text on Yoga. I am not concerned with writing a textbook; only in telling about the phenomena that surrounded me when it happened. There are many more books on Yoga now.)

The man appeared one bright fall day and told me to go to the library near me and get a certain book. He told me that he was described in the book. I practically ran to the library. I had thought by this time that I had read everything nearby on this subject, but evidently I missed one, for it was there just as he had said. He hadn't missed a trick. Even his address was given in the book, and, of course, I wrote at once. His letter came back quickly, and he accepted me for training. His name was Swami Sivananda, Sage of the Himalayas, doctor, author, Saint of India. I can remember so well the next letter saying very gently that I really should not eat meat, as violence cannot be in Yoga. That very next day I vomited the meat that looked so good to me, and I have not wanted it or longed for it since.

I had never thought of myself as one of the strong people who can discipline themselves through hardships. I preferred the easy way of drifting along and doing just what was really necessary to get by. Even now, I find when I look back that I never really gave anything up; it gave me up, and I had nothing to say about it. The happy look on the ascetic's face is this, I think. He finally accepts what he is and has been all the time. He suddenly finds himself complete unto himself. He has no need to reach out for anything.

Do not misunderstand me on this. I did not become unfeeling or unsympathetic. On the contrary, I found that I had just begun to know what love was. I became so sensitive that words were no longer necessary. I found that I talked very little, and such a rapture of happiness was with me most of the time that people seemed to feel it around me. I also learned not to talk too much about Yoga on the advice of the kind doctor, who said that people do not talk about

these things here because they do not fit into our society.

About this time, I went into a comprehensive study of the religions and philosophical ways of the world. I discussed these points with anyone I could find in my small world and eventually my mind began to emerge in a steady pattern of mysticism. It sustained me in all discussion, gave me tremendous energy and comforted me. It began to show me that love is the only thing that lasts. When you are really honest with yourself, you can see that everything is transient. The hunger leaves, the life changes, and we grow old. Children leave, parents leave, even husbands leave. The body never stays the same. What really lasts? It is said that one sure way to find the path of Yoga is to be "world-weary". This sounds like an unhappy path of negative thinking, turning one away from it before the start, but, on the contrary, when the emptiness that one feels in this kind of thing sets in, the usual reaction is to fear it. Nature abhors a vacuum. This feeling is very valuable because it allows you to fill with new concepts. It is the beginning of a new life – like being born again. The slightest thing can give you happiness, and you live for the moment. The flower has never been so delicate, the wind was never there before. The eyes look out on a new world and you never miss the part of you that dies, the part you fought so hard to keep alive.

You become extremely strong yet extremely vulnerable. It is a risk you have to take.

My practice went on; progress came steadily. Sometimes I did not think so, but I found that once the Yoga bug bites you, it goes inside and does its work with or without your consent. It is easier with consent. I found that I began to dream in Sanskrit. I didn't know what Sanskrit was, but I would remember the words from my dreams, sometimes seeing them being written for me carefully and slowly and strangely seeing myself solemn and silent trying to absorb them. I wrote these dream experiences to my teacher Sivananda, and he then informed me that this was Sanskrit and gave me the translation and also his instructions on what to do about it. When his letters came, I would carry them in my pocket until the next one arrived. I complained of working blindly. Then one came saying:

Reverend Immortal Self, I never meant that the blind is leading the blind. But you are led by a divine power, and that will leave you and those who follow you in the very high spiritual and exalted state of peace, joy, and divine ecstasy. Your first paragraph is itself an assurance that this is happening in your case. You are on the road to spiritual enlightenment. The road or path of the spiritual aspirant is lit by the Grace of the Lord and the protecting hands of the Teachers and Masters.

This was strange news for one who never had any religious background to speak of.

BABAJI & THE CHURCH

One night in a dream I wandered along a narrow, clear stream of water in the desert. I walked happily, as seemed always to be the case in my dreams. Rounding a bend I saw a picture hanging on a tree branch. I took it in my hands and saw a familiar face looking back at me. I remember saying: *"This is Mouna, I know it well."* I wrote Sivananda about this experience and he wrote back at once (the sessions at the kitchen sink had become few and far apart these days):

Mouna is the vow of silence. Students of Yoga use this as

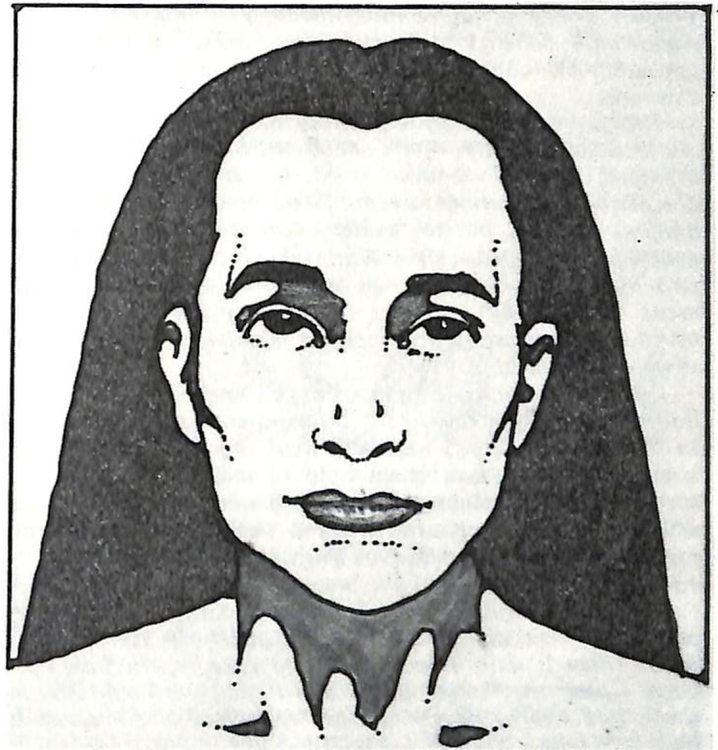
a method of controlling speech. Beginners in Yoga and people given to too much talking will find it very difficult to practice this. They should try for one hour daily and if they succeed they can extend it to two hours. After practice for one year, if there is progress, they can have one full day, "Fast of Silence", on Sunday. Silence or "Mouna" conserves energy. It adds to one's will power and makes him dynamic. Kindly go through my book on this; I have dealt with it in some detail. You need not be discouraged at your seemingly slow progress. Spiritual practices continued relentlessly and untiringly will overcome all difficulties.

In my studies, I discovered a book called "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda. I was fascinated by it and especially by the picture of a great Yogi whose name was Babaji. It was the face I saw in my dreams. Again I wrote Sivananda, and again came the answer:

Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Yukteswar, Matzyendranath, and others come in the line of great Yogis our beautiful Mother Bharatavarsha produced. They are ornaments of Yoga and a pride for present day Yogis and Saints. Really, you are lucky, having Darshan of such great Saints in your dreams. — You are in this line. — You are progressing well. Look not back. Aim high. Your progress is steady and sure.

I ran to the book, looked long and hard at Babaji's picture, and after a long time, said, *"I just don't believe it. If you are real, come to me yourself and say so. If this crazy thing is really happening to me, come and tell me yourself. The idea of "Saints" is foreign to me. I am a real disbeliever in everything that has been presented to me. Don't tell me to have faith. I'll answer you, "Have faith in what?"*

That night, as I lay in the state between sleep and wakefulness, a figure started to gather next to my bed. I watched silently, suddenly wide awake and extremely alert. The figure bent over me and I looked up into Babaji's face. It could have been my twin (and I know all amateur psychiatrists will



• Photo (1) Alice's other visionary teacher, Shri Babaji. For more on Babaji see, Autobiography of a Yogi by Yogananda.

laugh at that remark), but nevertheless, he was the image of me, except that he was a man. He had long copper-colored hair and smooth brown skin, strange for a man reported to be thousands of years old. He looked right into my eyes and

I said. *"Why, you don't look Indian; you look just like an American."* At that he laughed and laughed and then disappeared. Of course I again wrote Sivananda and received this reply:

This world of names and forms, pleasure and pain, good and bad, joy and sorrow, fire and water, friend and foe, is only a long dream for one who has discrimination. Lives are mere dreams within another dream. Some dreams last for a few minutes or hours, but the world dream lasts long and that we call "life". Ponder over the Truth behind the dream of names and forms. Negate the names and forms. Get rid of attachment for worldly pleasures, children, property. You will have complete rest, peace, joy and happiness which the soul so much is in need of.

Get rid of children? Negate life as I knew it? Give up my house? Suddenly I ran to my husband and stood holding on to him for dear life. I wept and wept and he, thinking some strange nightmare had taken hold of me, stood for awhile and then patted me on the head and went off to what was waiting for him. I spent the next few weeks trying with all my might to give up the practice of Yoga. It did not work.

The next letter said:

It is not possible for one to explain faith. Faith is rare, particularly in things Divine. In mundane things everyone has faith. There is faith in wealth, belonging, wife, children, husband. These are fleeting things and if you pin your faith in these, you will be deceived. How short-lived and insecure is happiness here.

You can take two cups of milk; the third cup brings retching and vomiting. You are very hungry. With four loaves of bread and a cup of tea your hunger is gone. Things of this world are so fleeting in nature. Friendship, relationship, worldly prosperity, youth, lordliness – all these are so fleeting. Having attained to a fleeting world, should we not try for more permanent things? Talk now weekly in classes to your friends on things Divine. You will have many followers. The world will beat its path to your door.

Now I was really scared. What had happened to the old me? Where was I going? What was I doing? I fell into a deep lethargy and all energy seemed drained out of me. The shock to my mind lasted several weeks. Again I tried to put Yoga out of my mind; again I failed. Then another letter from Sivananda:

Activity is the right way to get rid of inertia. Any kind of work is enough. Cleaning of clothes, house, cooking, etc., in the absence of any office work, should keep you busy. Do not be lenient to yourself; this is a great weakness. Be your own tutor and teacher. Let your discriminative mind watch you. Punish yourself with a complete fast for a day with mere water or a little lemon juice added. It is a passing thing. Do not be worried. Be alert, be active. Physical activity is of great help. You will be fine once again. The Bhagavad-Gita says 'Uddharet Atmanatmanam' – Raise yourself by yourself. Do not allow yourself to be depressed. May the Lord bless you and your family with all good health, long life, joy, peace and happiness.

Well, it was nice of him to think of all the lives he affects here, I thought, and so I went back to my practices – mainly because I couldn't do anything else. The pattern was set firmly now. All this work and effort toward God-Realization when I had no idea of what God was anyway. I was caught in the clutches of something I did not understand and I was doing my best to cope with it. It was a matter of survival now.

Late in the nineteen fifties, after I had been practicing for some time, Babaji came to me in a dream and told me that I would now begin a new church in Mentor, Ohio. It would eventually have a great potential for liberal religion in the midwest. The minute I awoke I decided to do something about it. My husband's mother, Linc, Eric, and I went to the Cleve-

land Eighty-Second Street Unitarian Society on the next Sunday morning. There I told Jesse Cavileer, the minister of the church at that time, that we needed a liberal church in Lake County. He laughed and said, *"Well, Alice, just put an ad in the paper saying that if anyone is interested in forming such a church, to come to your house in the evening."* I did just that.

That first meeting three people came to see what I was talking about. They were Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Rinzler of Willoughby, Ohio, and Mrs. Verne Smith also of Willoughby. We got together two dollars and sixteen cents for postage to mail out a little note in the area and we were in business. The following week there were twenty people at our home. We then legally consolidated our group and made plans to apply to Boston for the beginning of the East Shore Unitarian Church.

We moved into public quarters and from there began some of the happiest years in our lives – working, building, talking, worshipping, meeting marvelous people we had never known before. Our little group grew and prospered. Then one night in a dream, Babaji came again and told me that a man would come along and buy us a building for the church. He told me just where it would be. I told my husband and Emerson Schwenk (minister of the Eighty-Second Street Church then) how it would look and even took them to see it. At that time it was a handsome estate in Kirtland Hills. They really had a good laugh at me that day. How could I be such a dreamer? Why would anyone give us such a valuable piece of property? We numbered only 40 families at that time. Still, I insisted. From then on Emerson kidded me about it whenever he saw me. *"Any sign yet, Alice?"* he would ask.

The sign came. A member of our church called my husband one Sunday afternoon to say the morning speaker, Tom Peterson, wanted to buy us a building and what about it? We were flabbergasted. It was even too much for me, although I had known it all along. Mr. Peterson did buy the estate. We then bought the large house and grounds surrounding it for a very small sum of what the whole transaction had been. It was appraised for one-half million dollars, I believe.

How beautiful those days were after we moved into our new church home. How many afternoons we played on the broad lawns and ate our food together under the beautiful trees. Every time I walked in the door I thanked Babaji for that church; I still do. I think it has the greatest potential of any church in the Ohio-Meadville district now. Though many people find lots of things wrong with the Unitarian belief, I must say this for them – they let me in.

THE SEARCH

It was at this time that my husband suggested we sell our house and take an apartment, perhaps build a new house, and use some of the money to go to India to see Sivananda. After all these years he was making such a mark on my life that my husband felt I should go and see just who and what I was dealing with. I was stunned. I had never considered such a thing. Oddly enough, my husband looked at me strangely and said he was sure I had considered it.

We sold our house, moved to an apartment, and I began making plans to go see my teacher. The plans were never mentioned around the apartment, and when I spoke of them the subject was changed. It was as if they did not exist. Finally, I told him that if he did not like the idea of my going, I would stay home. He replied most emphatically that he would not be the one to tell me to stay home and that if I needed to see my teacher, then I should go. I argued that perhaps it would be too hard for him alone, with the boys, the apartment and all, but he persisted and said that he could handle

things nicely. I made arrangements for my shots, but was hurt deeply because it didn't seem I was needed at home. Then out of the blue – a letter from Sivananda:

The blessings of the Lord are always on you. How can you be hurt? Identification with the unreal always brings pain; be it wealth, body or anything. Keep the mind always detached from these and you will have no pain or suffering. Try to give the least thought now on things worldly. The more you think of them the more you will have to suffer–"

I went for my passport.

Then in July, I received this:

It delights me beyond measure to know that you are having victory over your mind and its operations. The positive always overcomes the negative; this is the immutable law. Persist in your practices and be regular. You will see that you get wonderful success over your mind and feelings. Do not give up the battle as hopeless. You will succeed now. It is definite. Sometimes you may feel dejected and would appear to be succumbing to the emotions that take the upper hand. Prayer, faith unshakeable, and firm in what you know and what you do not know will save you from all situations.

Prayer. What was prayer? But then where did I have to go anyway?

One night I dreamed of a deep hole in yellow ground. All around the upper edge men were busily working preparing something. I watched carefully, but I saw no reason for it. My mind said "grave", and I can remember telling a friend of mine that someone I knew had died, or was soon to die. Then, just two days before I was to leave for India, word came from Sivananda saying, *"Don't come. It is not the time."*

Time passed for me, and one sunny day, as I was happily helping with a family picnic at the church, a friend of mine who worked for a newspaper handed me a clipping. He said he knew I was interested in Yoga and had saved it for me. I looked at it casually and read: *"Swami Sivananda, Sage of the Himalayas is dead."* My mind went blank. Tears began to flow profusely, and my poor friend, knowing now what grief he had brought me, watched me run across the lawn to tell my family I was going home.

Sivananda was dead. For days I was prostrate with grief. It seemed that the only person who could ever make any sense out of what was happening to me was gone. He had shown me that my life had followed a classic pattern in the lives of Yogis.

There is no use trying to describe the days and weeks that followed. I tried desperately to give up Yoga; I tried to ignore the mystical world that I lived in. I knew I had to have a guru with me as I was in advanced practice now, and where was I to find one in that desert of mysticism, the midwest? People here hardly knew how to spell "Yoga". I found that grief or no grief, I was the same. The silence, that I tried to describe to people every now and then, came slipping back over my mind like a deep wave. I went back to my disciplines and practices, as by now, they were what I had become. No one ever knew of my loneliness except my husband, who watched and never said anything about it.

The winter came and went and it was spring. Out of the blue, Dr. Kulkarni, an Indian man who was doing research in organic chemistry at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, called me. He was in the U.S. for a year and had met a group of people who were interested in his studies of Yoga. They had put some funds together to bring his guru here from the Himalayas. He asked if I would meet his Guru, Rama, when he came. I asked how he had heard of me, for I had never met any group nor talked to anyone who had ever heard of Yoga, nor had I ever been affiliated with anyone who knew of my studies. He vaguely said that he had just happened to hear and would I meet Rama?

Would I? I ran to Cleveland, stopping just for a moment to pick an armful of lilacs, not realizing that the traditional greeting for the guru is flowers, and so off to the airport. A beautiful, small, brown man, with clear brown, laughing eyes met me. He took my flowers, looked into my eyes, and my heart stopped beating as he said, *"Alice I have come for you."* The rest of the day I was in a stupor. Everything that had happened to me up to this time had seemed so outlandish, so unbelievable, so far out, and this was the final blow.

I think it is very difficult for an American to think in terms of destiny. We are pretty much filled with the idea that we produce what we are and we maintain it. The feeling that life as we see it and think it to be is not that at all is a shock. All the tools of the ego, all the tools of the intellect are thrown into confusion. I think this is the "razor's edge" that is spoken of in Yoga – that narrow edge between sanity and insanity. Where does one find the balance between all these worlds. If one is lucky enough, it comes. It is a razor's edge, a difficult and lonely road leading gradually toward something you know is there. You get a glimpse of that something every once in awhile. Most of us live the whole of our lives on just that glimpse.

The summer went on. Rama was very busy lecturing and teaching all over the country. I tried to be with him as much as possible. When the time came for him to return to India, he started my practices in "mantric yoga". I can remember so clearly that day when we sat on the stone patio off the dining room of our home and a big wistaria blossom kept brushing his ear. He would flick it away, then catch it next time and try to smell it. As the wind bothered him with it, he complained that American flowers did not have the fragrance of Indian flowers; then he looked at me and gallantly said, *"That is, some of them."* He gave me a string of beads called a "mala". He told me that now, to really concentrate the mind, I must begin a half-million repetitions of a Sanskrit



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phrase – a mantram – and complete them by spring. His eyes looked directly into mine. I can always feel the shock of them. His eyes were more penetrating than I could bear sometimes. Then he said – *"What do you want – Vishnu, Brahma or Shiva?"* Suddenly a vision took hold of me and a beautiful face looked into the very core of me. The arms reached out to me and enfolded me in the center of it. Rapture overcame me. I could hardly speak. Shiva, Shiva, Shiva – the word came over and over from my lips. Who was Shiva? I never knew. Why did I say that? I never knew. All I saw then was Rama's tender look and the world came back to the stone patio. He instructed me and I began.

In the fall, Rama had to return to India. Again I went through the terrible days that I had gone through following the death notice of Sivananda. Was I really so fickle? Now I realized that Shiva spoke to me through them all. Shiva, principle of motion in the universe. How could such a principle take on a personal aspect in an unbelieving American, non-mystical mind as mine?

I practiced hard all winter. My mind no longer vacillated back and forth. The idea of insanity no longer plagued me. I knew now that I had never been more sane. Life in our home was smooth and happy, and I felt a wholeness and fulfillment that I had never thought possible before. Letters flowed between India and our home and I knew that the guru was there. I now followed all instructions fully, trustingly. The only time I ever had trouble with myself and my life – and I still find this true – was when I fought it. As long as I gave myself up to it, all went well. This kind of thinking takes a little time.

Then it was spring. Rama was due to come back again. I lived for the moment he would arrive. He was the same and my heart overflowed. He stayed at our house as often as I could arrange it and his schedule allowed. When he was there the house seemed to take on a glow. I knew he would leave

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soon to return to his country and I wanted to go with him and study a few months in India. I thought my husband agreed too quickly. I asked him to tell me if he didn't want me to go since I wouldn't dream of going without his consent or good wishes. He stated that if I felt that this would help in the ordeal that I had come through in the last fifteen years, I should go and finish my training and come home. I made plans to go. My children bravely tried to hold themselves steady. I wavered, wept, and begged my husband to ask me to stay home; he never did. I looked at them with tremendous love; never had they meant more to me. I am sure this sounds strange, for I was torn in pieces. I told them, *"three months, that's all. Can you stand three months without me?"* They said they could.

•Photo (1) Alice's Gurudev, Shri Swami Rama of Kashmir and Saptasarovar; (2) Swami Rama performing a fire ceremony as an initiatory rite for the East Shore Unitarian Church, Mentor, Ohio, that Babaji had directed Alice in founding.



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Now as I look back, I see things more clearly. I realize that no one ever expected me to return from *"the cave"*. My parents cried and refused to go with me to the plane. Giving me all the love they could, they kissed me good-bye and gave me up for dead. It seems that in all this time, when I thought no one really realized the depth of what was happening to me except myself, I had been wrong. I had been watched very closely. Perhaps I had been kissed good-bye and given up for dead a long time ago.

When the gigantic push for completeness occurs in a person everyone watches the squirming of the one going through it – as one watches a fish on a hook, knowing that, even though they don't have to cope with it yet, the same thing lurks within themselves. Evolution of the self lies sleeping in the subconscious, just waiting for its time.

My sons and husband took me to the plane the last of July. I was to meet Rama in California and he would take me across the world for my training – whatever it might be. No words could describe our parting. All our hearts broke and we all died a little that day.

I stayed with an old friend in California for a few days waiting for Rama. I called home every night desperately trying to remember the voices of my family; trying to say something besides *"Good-bye, good-bye"*. Then the last night came and I knew I would be leaving the next day. There was only silence. The stillness had conquered us all.

We left for Honolulu early in the morning. It was a lovely trip, although I didn't speak much that day. Rama said nothing, but he seemed to be quite aware of the suffering that I was going through.

Honolulu is one of the most beautiful places on this earth. Our accommodations were in a hotel right on the beach of Waikiki near Diamond Head. I walked right through the lobby into the sand and water, and that day I swam most of the time. The next day, I rented a small car and Rama and I drove all over the island. I seemed to be catching hold of myself a little and I was grateful for that. We were to leave for Tokyo in the morning.

That evening I wore a fragrant lei of frangipani and a long dress of bright cotton and no shoes. We ate on the beach and I told Rama I was going for a swim. He said it was too late and too dangerous, but I insisted and went to change. He left and went to his room. As I waded out in the clear water, the moon was full and the water so clear that you could see the white sand at the bottom. I began to swim out and the breakers rolled over me and I became entranced with the water. I dove deeper and deeper into the silence that had become familiar to me over the years. There was no need to breathe at all; I didn't want to surface. My body was complaining for breath but I ignored it. I realized a rapture that I never wanted to end. Suddenly Rama appeared in my mind. He put his thumb on my forehead and ecstasy flowed through me to such an extent that I was unable to support it. I don't know how long I was down there, but suddenly I surfaced, gasping for air. I managed to get myself back in the shallow waters of the beach and lay at the edge of the water until I could walk. Then I went to my room and slept. The ecstasy stayed with me for days.

ON THE WAY

We left Honolulu, leaving behind all my strings of flowers, the orchids, the crystal warm waters, and all things that paradise could ever hold. My watch had Los Angeles time and if Rama hadn't come racing in at the last moment we would have missed our plane. We made it though, and the flight was a long one, lasting nine hours. They gave us hot wet towels

•Photo (1) Statue of Lord Shiva, King of Yogis, in a temple at The Light of Yoga Society, Cleveland Hts., Ohio.

and took off our shoes when we sat down. We were given golden fans and chopsticks, and all during the nine hours little things were served: seaweed sandwiches, little compotes, and then a larger supper. There were eight stewards and hostesses to wait on people. The girls wore kimonos and there were flowers everywhere.

We reached Tokyo airport in a blinding rain; it was very hot. The people had umbrellas waiting, and as I went down the plane steps they said, *"American – American"*, while bowing and smiling. I was one of two white people on the plane. How strange to be so different and foreign-looking. Then as we stood in line for customs, a man pulled my sleeve and said, *"American, please"*, and took us directly through without waiting. The customs man did not open our baggage at all. Then we got a note from another page and it said that a man from the Utahjaya Inn was waiting for us at the limousine desk. You cannot imagine the crowds of people packed in that place – still hardly any noise at all – just murmurs. And there in that huge crowd was a big sign, *"Welcome, Alice Christensen – and the Rama."* We really flipped over that. A nice boy was carrying it and we were so glad to see someone to welcome us.

Well, he bowed and we bowed, and we found that he spoke only two words of English, but we got the idea we were to go with him and we went, like children in the woods. He left to get a little car and screeched up to us with tires smoking. After settling in, off we went – and I really mean off. He drove at 120 kph down the road, careening madly from side to side, always on the wrong side of the road. The sweat was really running down my face. Rama laughed at my nervousness and said, *"Don't worry, Alice, I'll pray for you."* We finally got to a teeming district of people and ships. The boy pulled through a gate into what looked like the Ohio Foundry refuse entrance and we screeched to a halt.

There were large crowds of girls on their knees in kimonos bowing all around. Lots of men with rags tied over their foreheads took our bags, then the ladies took our shoes and finally we were taken up and up into a little shack of a house with no windows. The effect on me was terrible. I felt like my throat was closing and I could not breathe. Everyone was bowing and hissing and on we went. I was taken through a small corridor I could hardly stand up in. It led into a room with grass mats on the floor and two small tables with one bowl. There were no windows and from this opened a small room with a big pit for bathing. A girl took off my slippers and then started running the bath. I realized that no one spoke a word of English. I was dying of claustrophobia, and I was desperately hot and tired. The girl started to take my dress off, and then right in the same bath I heard a man's voice and a giggling girl! I realized then that I was sharing my bath and I clutched what American clothes I still had about me and began to yell for Rama, Japan Air Lines, and everything else I could think of. All the girls began clucking and hissing and the head man came and clucked and hissed and I sat on the floor thinking, *"How did I ever get into this?"* When Rama came in he took one look at me sitting on that grass mat, all the people hissing and clucking around, my clothing situation, and started to laugh like a madman. He laughed and I cried. After our separate hysterics, he said *"We must leave this place; they will serve us meat."* I got all my clothes and he found my shoes, meanwhile giving me a lecture on the Oriental mind. He got Japan Air Lines on the phone and they sent us to the Tokyo Hilton.

We carried our bags down with all the people following us trying to help the poor foreign woman (who was a little mad) get a taxi. They finally got one and after they tried to explain where the Hilton was we got in. After careening through all the districts of Tokyo we finally stumbled on the hotel.

That night I didn't leave my room, but had some hot chocolate there. The room was beautiful, with sliding screens and wall hangings and only two American chairs. The next morning I was myself again. Rama was on the phone to the Indian Embassy, and I had breakfast in my room feeling like a real "babe in the woods".

We decided to leave earlier than planned. But while still in Tokyo, we went on a bus tour to the Kamakoura Buddha – a huge bronze Buddha – and then on to Mailka, the mountains and active volcano surrounding Fujiyama. We did not see the sun once while we were there. It was always humid and rained about every hour on the hour. The lakes in the mountains are lovely and the view of the volcano is really spectacular.

We drove along the beaches and you cannot imagine the crowds and the filth. They call the beach "Excuse me beach" because you have to keep saying "excuse me, excuse me" to swim. The traffic everywhere was terrible and the smell of fish was everywhere. Our hotel was wonderful and very reasonable, only eleven dollars. Every now and then I got a big surge of loneliness – but there was so much to look at that it passed.

In the mountains, we took a boat across the lake and met all kinds of fascinating people. There were only two Americans. I could not get used to the bowing and hissing and how strange it was to see a white flag with a red sun flying above us. My memories of the war years were very much with me and I found to my surprise, they were with the people there too. Tokyo was seventy percent destroyed and it was still pulling out of the ruins. One thing was extremely noticeable. I never heard a child cry nor did I see anything but tenderness and affection for children. They seemed to be common property. They were loose everywhere; men and women would pick them up, and when they tired, the children would go on to others. When they were sleepy someone, man or woman, would strap them in a little velvet sack on their back and the child would continue to sleep. When they were too big for that, the father carried them in his arms. Old men also carried children: in fact, the children seemed to live in a different world. A guide told me that the small ones are never reprimanded or restrained in any way until they are six, then they start school and are expected to toe the line. Babyhood is one time – school days one time – adulthood another time – and they are very specific times clearly defined.

Rama called me at 4:30 a.m. every day to walk; I fell into bed at night. I ate breakfast and the days passed; it was a dreamlike existence.

We left the Tokyo Airport, whizzing through customs and immigration. Then we boarded. Hot and humid, the smell of fish and urine surrounding us, I was glad to leave Japan. Our plane took off and about one half-hour into the Pacific one motor stopped. They flew all around, dumped out much of the fuel into the sea and we landed back in Tokyo. We got out in the heat, fish and urine smell again and were taken to a hotel. Everyone line up, bowed and hissed, and then all were given hotel rooms. Afterward we were directed to a dining room set with crystal and gorgeous china and served a five-course lunch which took one and one-half hours. Then back to the room – bow – bow – bow and about 2 p.m. we were put in cars and back to the plane and on to Hong Kong. At 6 p.m. we came into the harbor of Hong Kong. It is so breathtaking that words cannot describe it. There like a jewel, set in the middle of the sea and the great mountain ranges of China, is this city. Ships from all over the world swing at anchor and lighthouses light seven peaks in the harbor. The airstrip is one little strip of grass right down the middle of the harbor.

We passed quickly through customs again and into the city. The hotel had a man waiting for us and we drove in bright sunlight. The city is filled with people from all over the world; women in brocade and silk pajamas, shops filled with bronze

and tiger skins, all the markets of the world are here. My room in the hotel was long and narrow. The walls were covered with gold damask with white peonies and butterflies all over the 17-foot ceiling. Even the bathroom had damask-covered walls and ceiling. My bed was long and thin with a high canopy and four slim posts at each end – really an old antique. Large tall chests with gold dragons held my clothes. One wall of the room was all glass and crystal with a marble shelf for dressing. There were two brocaded chairs and a carved table holding a huge silver dish of fruit. A plate and silverware graced the table, on which there was a note, "Welcome to Hong Kong". Over in one corner was a carved desk with a brocaded chair and all the things one could use. Oh, I could go on and on. Crystal lights hung the whole length of the ceiling and the place was like a dream. It rained about once every hour on the hour and free raincoats were everywhere. We traveled up to the border of Red China through the mountains, and I did a little shopping. How wonderful the ivory shops were, whole tusks of elephants carved into a story; brocades, pearls, jade.

Rama had never been here so it was very new to both of us. He pushed me along one minute and cajoled me the next, and somehow I managed to get through the terrific melee of oriental life that would take years to get used to.

I thought perhaps that I should be very careful of what I ate in the Orient, but so far everything agreed with me. I just nibbled on everything and drank what I wanted. I seemed to be in tip-top health.

Never in my life had I seen anything like this. The oriental mass was overwhelming. People lived in anything that resembled a hole: part of an old roof or some tree roots spread over with a cloth. Rickshaws were pulled by human legs, which are cheap, as is life. Vigorous building went on everywhere; the out-thrust of an industrious mass of people. I did not see any women working here, just men. Even my maid here was a man. He put my hairbrush on the shelf, made my bed, hung my clothes, turned lights off and on, and sat outside in the hall waiting for orders.

I wandered everywhere. People were so kind to me; they treated me like a child. I was not afraid anymore.

DELHI

We checked in at the Erawan Hotel in Bangkok. I had seen the palaces of Thailand, the emerald Buddha, the buffalo, the mud, heat and filth of the Orient. I was so very tired, I needed to rest awhile. Rama said we should not linger any longer, but head home to India, so we were leaving that afternoon at 6 p.m. He had telegraphed his people in Delhi to meet us early. He was upset by my free talking and laughing with people, and sometimes he stepped between me and whoever had come to speak to me and started in another language, and they took off. He said I was not to wander about anymore, but to stay close and keep my eyes open. No free laughing, no slacks, no short skirts. I had seen only one or two Americans there; no women, all men. I was glad I was not alone here. People said *"American – American – American"* and looked very strangely at us all the time.

I was making it a point never to complain about anything. I was trying to be very strong and I was succeeding too, even though my spirit was a little tired. The Orient overwhelms one. The whole mass of it – pushing, striving for life – cannot be described. One could only feel it like a hot breath on the cheek. I was like a hothouse plant here. Little charming groups of school girls followed me around the temples. They looked me over tooth by tooth. My hair was really getting red-blonde and I stood out like a sun torch, one little girl said.

My room here had a balcony overlooking a courtyard with waterfalls and swimming pool. I swam one night but the water was awfully hot. It was about one hundred and ten degrees in Bangkok.

We stayed only one day and pushed on to Delhi. The customs and airport were really terrible. We toured the royal palace in Bangkok and the temple of the emerald Buddha and went back to the hotel and packed. We changed our flight to Air France in the early morning as there was only one flight leaving for Delhi. The telephone only worked from one-thirty to two-thirty, so Rama sent a cable saying we would arrive early. We went to the airport in a blinding storm; then at 5 p.m. a typhoon hit us. All flights were stopped. The heat was intense and there wasn't a breath of air. All the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Thais and I were jammed under the one punka (fan) and lizards crawled up and down the walls and ceiling, grabbing at the bugs. There were no screens or window curtains used anywhere. The storm broke in all its fury, and we stayed there until 11:00 p.m. waiting to take off.

Finally, completely exhausted, we boarded the plane. It rose to thirty-six thousand feet to avoid the storm, but still we were buckled in all the way and it was extremely cold. We landed in Delhi at 2:45 a.m. Delhi time, and I thought surely that no one would have waited that long. To my surprise, as we stumbled down the aisle Rama grabbed his dress coat and got all cleaned up. When we came down the steps of the plane a shout went up from all those crowds of people. I thought it was some disturbance, but then I saw them hang garlands of roses and jasmine around his neck and kiss his feet; they put their heads and their children's heads on his feet. They threw flowers and spices at us and they said they were blessed by my coming as I had brought the rain with me; the rainy season had not come at all this year. Now the land would be fertile again as Rama had returned to his people.

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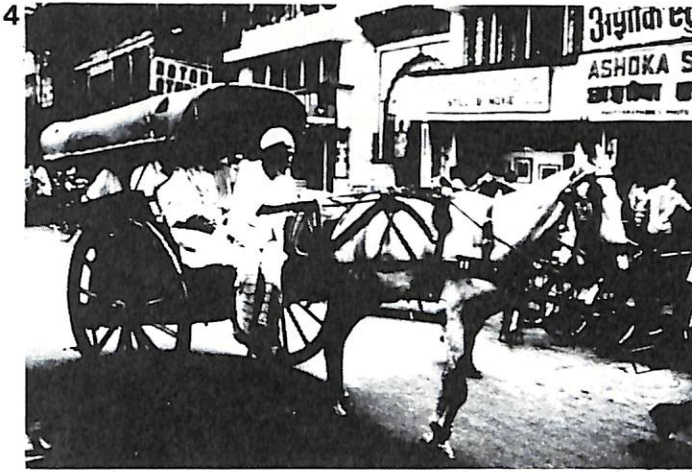


I simply stood there nearly fainting from exhaustion, and felt as if it were not really me at all seeing those people. We were put through the incredible mess of customs and immigration in India, in August, at 2:30 a.m., and patted and bowed and smiled into a car and off into the dark night. A large white cow was pulling a tank of gasoline in the airport drive and I asked what that animal was. They said, *"That's a bullock,"* and then they laughed that this lady who could bring rain didn't even know what a bullock was. All was bedlam; people driving in clouds around the car we were in, trying to call to Swamiji, and honking and waving and jolting around the cows in the road. I can't describe it.

At last we arrived at Dr. Kelkar's home where we were met with more flowers and cakes. Drinks of water were served and there was more foot-kissing, which still fascinates me – how American I am. Then came the big discussion of where I would sleep best. They decided to put me right in the middle of the



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living room around which the rest of the rooms opened. A rope cot was dragged out, two long frames with rope woven in the middle, and a white sparkling clean, starched and embroidered cloth was spread on the rope. Then a small pillow, like a TV pillow, was placed exactly right, and my bed was made. All around were people and servants who slept on the floor of the porches, so I edged into the bathroom and put on a robe in the one hundred and ten degree heat – and then walked very majestically to the rope sling, while everyone waited as I lay down in royal splendor to see if I was comfortable. They decided I was. The fan was put on right over my head and they left, patting and bowing. The quiet of the night settled about me. I lost consciousness from exhaustion, and the next

•Photo (1) Rickshaw driver in New Delhi rain; (2) street scene of motorized scooter taxis; (3) large bullock pulling grain cart; (4) horse-drawn tonga in Old Delhi.

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thing I knew the dawn was breaking and the birds were sitting on the floor and on the bed. People were moving about, and everyone was smiling.

Birds flew freely in the house. They say that sparrows are always where man's soul is —so that if the birds are not in a house, souls will not live there either. Green parrots sat in all the trees. I woke up to a constant stream of people. They had a sort of throne prepared for Rama in the main room with an oriental rug on it and he sat in majestic splendor with garlands around his neck. He was a king here. I was unused to such devotion to a living man. They dressed me in a yellow sari with roses in my hair, and then I was presented: the living sacrifice to Shiva, having left her home, husband, children, mother and father to seek the divine soul in the master's training in the jungles and the mountain country.

It went on and on. It was nice to have them speak mostly in Hindi; it gave me a rest and I just bathed, sat, bathed, sat, and when I felt tired, I'd lie down on my rope bed and the people continued coming. We would be here a week, then up to the jungle above Haridwar. I felt like I was in a spell; I didn't know what days or nights were anymore. I was aware of the heat, that was all. When they thought I was hungry, they fed me. The food was good but strange to me in the sense that it seemed dreamlike. Dr. Kelkar, who was doing poetry translations of old Indian myths for UNESCO, and his family were all charming. Everywhere I was guarded and treated as a child.

The rains came in force. As it was the monsoon season the heat and humidity were indescribable. It was impossible to sleep in the middle of the living room with no clothes on, so I sweltered at night. The rope bed felt very good to me now. The servants would haul it in about 10 p.m, throw the muslin cloth over it and everyone would smile. All the people sat around the bed talking for about half an hour – half Hindi, half English – and gradually the house quieted down. The

servants were the last to retire and I saw them take at least one last look at the white foreigner before they lay on the bare floor outside the porch to sleep.

The large servant's quarters were in the back and two days before we came a new child was born there. They had put up a canvas roof and sang and danced late into the night to honor the newborn. The servants were allowed in once before bedtime to kiss Rama's feet and receive some prasad (fruit or food from his hand) and then they disappeared. One of the servants, a twelve year old boy worked very hard. He only had one set of clothes and they were often wet and muddy. As we were leaving for one of the many feasts and teas prepared for us, I went downstairs and there on the floor lay the boy shivering, his wet clothes hung on the railing. I bent over the child and went running to get him some food, but everyone had a fit about this. Rama said, *"Alice, you cannot feel this way about each and every case; this is India, you must adjust."* But I could not leave, so I covered him with a dry blouse and patted him a little, crying and thinking of my boys' lives and my own. The boy had gone with my shirt when I came back, so at least he was dry for awhile.

Things were a bit much for me that day. In the car, I got a long lecture on Indian customs and mankind in general.

The days were so busy. I had been fed until my stomach felt burned out. Some of the food was delicious, especially Mrs. Kelkar's because she left out the spice for me. They cooked chapatti, a kind of whole wheat pastry, over a bucket of red hot coals. The little boy prepared it on the floor and mashed it with a wooden thing, then with his bare hand laid it on the bucket of hot coals and turned it over. It puffed up fat and then went very flat and tough. It was really good and they knew I loved it. There were two children – one a lovely, tall girl, very beautiful who dressed me and undressed me and translated for me and was pretty much my constant companion. The other was a boy about eleven or twelve with a bad heart. Rama was treating him, and we hoped he would become well. Dr. Kelkar's wife, Mandakini was very plump and extremely submissive in every way. She ran the house completely, hardly ever leaving it – it was her world. The boy sat in the bars of the windows and watched us coming and going. The lizards crawled on the walls eating bugs and lots of animals came in and out. The floors were large stone slabs, very smooth and cool. They were washed everyday and clothes were changed everyday, with two baths a day. Clothing was thrown in a heap in the hall and some poor wretch of a woman crawled in with a bucket, sat on the stone, and washed them in the bucket. I protested the hard work and she was insulted that I should protest her work; she was proud, and that was her duty in earning a living. Seemingly no work was unbearable to them; they were all proud of their work. The servant was embarrassed for me when I said "thank you." I was instructed not to say thank you to a servant. Now I said nothing. In the peculiar situation that I was in I was spoken to quite frankly as one does when training a child.

I visited a Rajah's house one day. He asked Rama to put me up there in more comfortable quarters and offered to buy all kinds of saris, etc. for my comfort. Rama became quite upset about it, talking in Hindi, and the Rajah spoke no more about it. I too felt somehow, that the look in the man's eye reflected more than simple charity. At any rate there was much discussion of my childlike ways and American openness and all that. They dressed me in a beautiful gold sari with a green border and the tailor made me a gold blouse. They braided flowers in my hair, as suits a sacrifice to Shiva, and I was to be presented to people at dinner, lunch and tea.

They got an Indian driver's license for me and soon we would be on the way to Haridwar. One morning as I was writing, the rats ran under my chair. The shock showed on my

face even though I tried to hide it. Rama saw my horror and said, *"Now get hold of yourself. Now we go to the place of big animals, these are small ones. The cats and elephants await you."*

The Ganges was in flood and the telephone lines to Haridwar were down. Still we would try to ford the river and leave for the northern jungles. I was preparing myself for the hard test. So far, though the conditions had been rough in comparison to home, they were considered luxurious to what lay ahead. Everyone tried to talk Rama out of taking me, saying I could not stand it, but he was sure I could. So I put my faith in him as always and went ahead.

My health seemed very good. I was in full swing and I would push on. They checked to see if there were any roads open to Haridwar and Kashmir. The conditions were very hard but we would go around the edge – when the time came.

I still could not get used to the foot-kissing. Every once in awhile I would be reminded of a Peter Sellers' kind of movie and go off choking with laughter. And then, sometimes I crawled off with the lizards in the corner and cried a little. So far I was well and I was getting tough – it was hard to recognize myself. At the last minute Rama decided we would go by train.

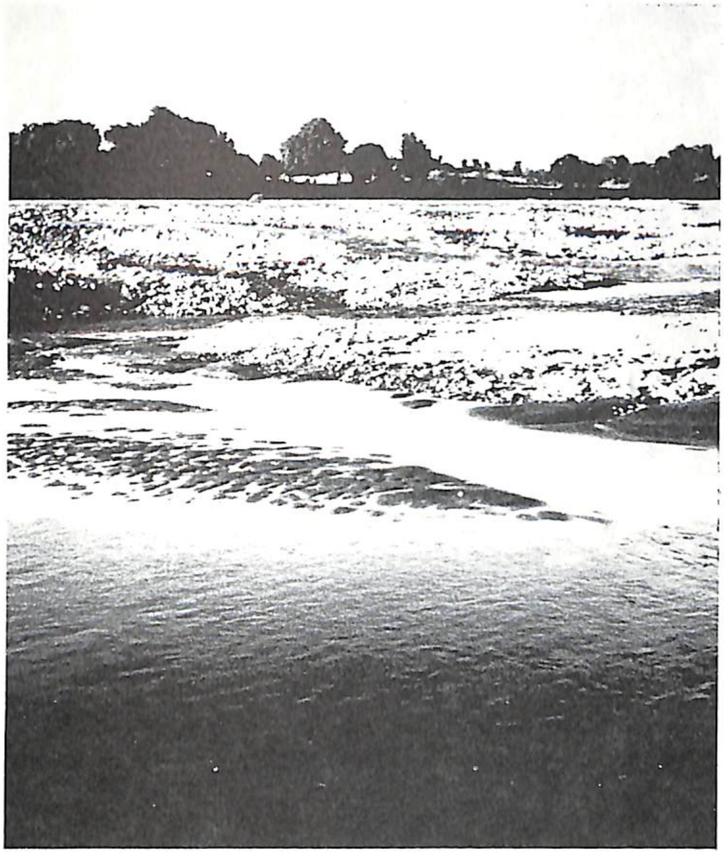
We left New Delhi about 5 p.m. All kinds of people took us to the train station, which was in old Delhi. It is an incredible place, just like the old drawings of hell in Dante's Inferno. Dead animals lay crushed in the street, people slept everywhere. There were lots of Moghul tombs which lay in ruins around the place full of rats and mongooses. People lived in all of them, with no sewage system, no streets, no beds, no roofs and hardly anything but the rain and the sun. Animals wandered all over; poor wretched horses pulled carts and always the throngs and throngs of humanity. All day and night people walked, sold, ate, urinated and defecated in the paths and streets.

Time still had that peculiar sense of no day – no night. Just time. I was awake, although sometimes I felt as though I was in a deep state of anesthesia or shock. I remember feeling this way when I was under ether. At any rate, we were put on the train. We traveled first class – I couldn't tell you how the other classes were. There were four of us in a cubicle and we lay on boards under which our luggage was placed. Sanji and I, Rama and a strange man lay down to sleep on those boards. Sanji, a devotee of Rama's, stayed with me all the time. She was about thirty-five (it was hard to tell) and very shy and frail. She rocked on her haunches all night and I lay on those boards, trying to make some sense of my life and my actions. We had locked the grille door and men pounded on it all night trying to sell us things. It seemed like we were in a cage with animals outside. I could see their faces peering in the windows and grillwork. The land around us was flooded now. We went on in the night, creaking and rocking. About 4 a.m., we pulled into Haridwar.

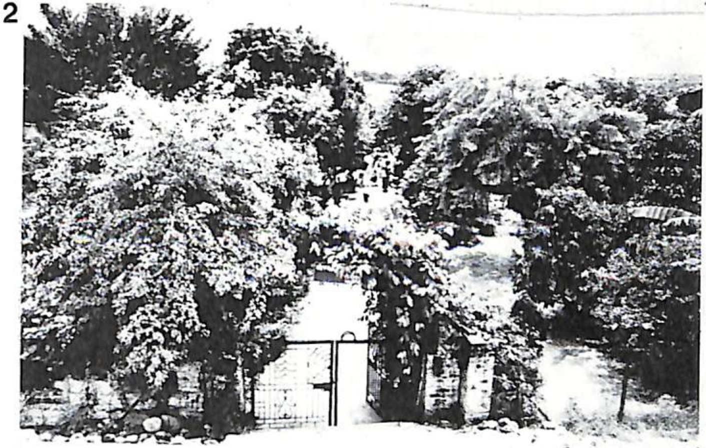
MOUNTAIN RETREAT

We then traveled on up into the jungles and mountains, leaving the village behind. I saw the great branches of the Ganges – seven in all – coming together out of the mountains with a great roar. We walked down a small path and there, overlooking the roaring and boiling Ganges, was Ram Kunj, which means Rama's Bower. It was a nice little place after what I had just seen. We went to the hut where I was to live. The floors were cow dung and one part of the hut was for me

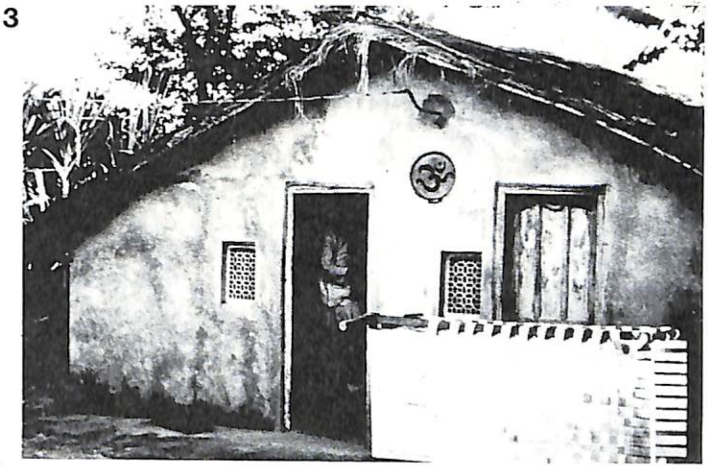
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•Photo (1) (2) pg. 21 of Swami Rama and Alice. Photo (1), pg. 24, Ram Kunj as seen from edge of Ganges; (2) Ram Kunj front gate; (3) thatched hut where Alice lived.

alone. Sanji slept in the next room and there was a flush toilet next to my room. Rama had had it put in so it would look civilized for me. There was electricity and water from a tap. A heavy thatched roof about four inches thick topped the hut and a small verandah ran around the outside. Though extremely crude, everything was clean and neat compared to city life, and there were all kinds of flowers and birds. Servants lived here and tea was prepared. I had tried not to look at any kitchens so far. I was well, though very tired.We had not eaten all night or day so they gave us a paste of wheat and some other things and it tasted good to me. Leopards, tigers, and elephants were wild here as well as monkeys and snakes. I was not allowed to roam past the flower garden or speak to anyone but Sanji and Rama; nor was I allowed to wear slacks. I was completely covered with a sari and I had to take care to stay that way, Rama said. They had put a thin glass of flowers on the poi ch, and the sight was pathetically dear to me.

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Now my Yogic schedule began in earnest. I would try it with all I possessed. Everyone was watching to see if the American would crack, but she would not. I would live on wheat paste once a day; that was what was given me and I would not ask for anything. It had become a game with me to keep my face completely reposed in such a way that no one could tell what I was thinking at all. They were watching me closely, but I did not betray myself. So far inside, despite the terrible fatigue I felt, I was strong in heart.

Now, if I could catch hold of myself a little and tighten my belt a little more, I would do nicely. I loved the solitude here and the fall of water rushing all the time. No stink and filth. The people around me were sensitive in face and manner, and though wretchedly poor, their life had a definite stable pattern of things that I liked.

The next day the sun shone. The Ganges had roared out of its banks again the previous night. The storms were so bad that rain poured through the thatched roof of our hut and even the animals huddled with us for cover – wild though they were. The water was pouring in on our beds and clothes. The stakes were barely holding. I fought the flood with the rest of them. The men and women took stones from the edge of the river and stacked them high to hold back the water.

They worked with incredible patience. I stood the strain pretty well, but toward dawn I began to give way. The people came to Rama and asked that he stop the storm. He looked at me and said, *"Do you wish? I thought you loved the waters and floods."* I was so tired and wet I started to cry. Then he said *"within twenty minutes it will stop."* He told the two men and Sanji that they were to say something over and over

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• Photo (1) Swami Rama, Sanji's mother, and Sanji; (2) Swami Rama in evening hours; (3) Alice's daily Gita lessons with her Guru; (4) Alice during evening chanting.



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in Sanskrit; then he paced up and down and no one said anything. Even the birds were too weak; the rats were too. Then, by George, if that damned storm didn't stop right on the minute. I know perfectly well you won't believe this but I am telling you just how things were. I was astounded. He told me that he would give me a necklace of jewels that would enrich not only my life, but all who came to me. He taught me more of these "mantrums" with a power you cannot imagine. My training had begun in earnest.

One night we went to get supplies in Haridwar which was a long way. It was a big thing. Rama was worried about my not living too well on our diet, but I was determined to manage. We went part of the way by rickshaw. It was the first time I had been out of the little camp since my arrival. The town was incredible; troop trains coming through those narrow streets with people lying all over the road; cows and bullocks everywhere.

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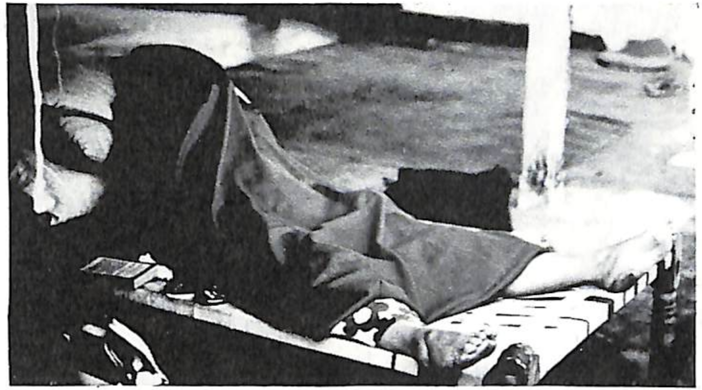


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Food was so very dear. It cost six dollars for four tomatoes, one package of wheat paste, three pears, two Cokes (a rare treat), and one small can of pineapple. Oh, it was a treat to eat that night. I couldn't describe the scene to you – all the masses of people offering dishes of flowers to the Goddess of the Ganges to appease her and the lightning and the dark sky with more rain coming. We piled into a rickshaw cart and started home; the man carried the oil light around his belt and the flimsy cart swayed back and forth. Sanji and I sat in one seat, Rama in the other. The cart took us as far as it could, then we walked, ran and stumbled on and got home before the storm began. How good that little hut looked to me. We spread out our feast on the floor in the covered room and ate. We talked about my life at home. All was well. I was getting tough and we began to see the sun in the mountains. That night they captured a wild elephant at the river.

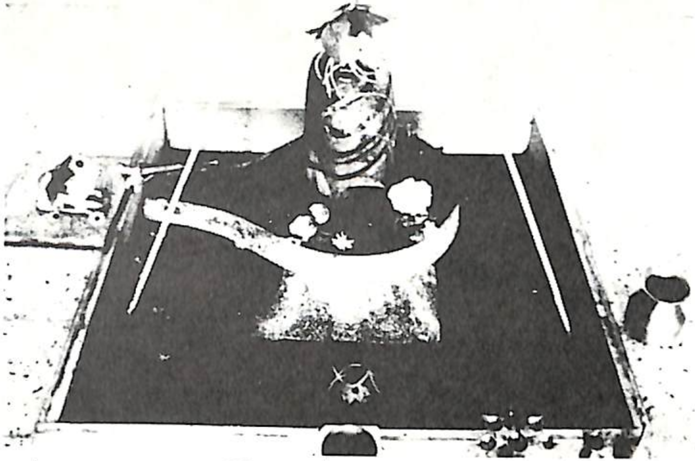

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The rains continued. The jungle around us soaked it up and gave out clouds of insects and flies. I had a rope cot that was laid out with my sleeping bag, and over it hung a huge netting. My sleeping bag was a source of great amazement and wonder to all. Everyone looked at the zipper and gasped that such a wonderful thing was invented. The little compound was fenced off from the jungle by sticks tied together and the Ganges flowed in front. The fence would keep out most animals but not elephants, I was told. At night, the rats were very busy in the thatched roof over the porch where I slept. Strange birds and flowers were very thick and hibiscus, like mine in Mentor, formed a hedge. Rama hooked a fan (punka) above me to keep the bugs away. I swam with Sanji in the river that day and the current was terrific and cold, even just on the edge where we stayed. I lost the rubber band for my hair, how important it had become to me.

•Photo (1) Swami Rama in abstract mood; (2) Rama at morning tea, charpoy-woven bed with mosquito netting stands to his side; (3) the kitchen sink; (4) vegetable market in Haridwar; (5) Alice wearing shawl, napping after afternoon Gita study.



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IN TRAINING

Now my training had taken shape, bringing years of practice into focus. I was up at 5 a.m. or before; I washed, and then had a cup of scalding tea made with some leaves from a nheem bush. I washed again and started my japa for three hours. I did it continuously; then breakfast, then prayers, meditation and exercise (asans) until noon. I tried to take care of what I had to wear and keep something dry. Everything was so damp. My hair never seemed to dry. My fingers kicked up a bit with arthritis, but it seemed all right. There

•Photo (1) Alice and Rama during a fire ceremony; (2) the holy Shiva lingam in Ram Kunj; (3) Rama surrounded by incense smoke during morning puja and meditation.

was a tall, skinny hut made of sticks covered with coarse cloth. Inside was a lingam stone, and there flowers were placed each morning for Shiva. This was where I did my japa, in about a four foot square space.

I seemed to have caught hold of myself; I even sang a little as I swam one morning. The heavy work made the day pass and by dusk I was exhausted.

Orange-robed monks and ruffians (as Rama said most of them were) wandered everywhere. The tops of the mountains lay in clouds. The Pakistan-India war was on, and the refugee problem was terrible. You can't imagine their condition as they crawled out of the hills of Kashmir trying to escape the jungle warfare. Their will to live was very strong. I don't think I could have faced what they did.

The rains had been kept away each day now by the sun mantrum. I now used it also. The river was fast, but in control. Rama told me of Tantric Yoga, but my American side

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was still very much with me so I didn't pay too much attention to it.

Rama told me to hide myself whenever men came to the camp, that I must look at the ground, never laugh or smile and never, never speak to them. Two nights previously I had been sleeping on my cot – I slept outside now, the rains had stopped, the stars were beautiful, and the rats didn't bother me so much – and had awakened from a sound sleep crying hysterically. I had an uncontrollable desire to go out of the compound gate and down to the river, something I had orders never to do alone. I got out of bed and paced back and forth on the stone walk, and finally I couldn't stand it anymore and ran for the gate. Sanji came crying out of the hut and Rama ran after me and stopped me. Then I saw a man waiting in the dark shadow of the gate. He didn't dare come in, as Rama's reputation was strong, but somehow – and this is really true whether you belive it or not – he had put the

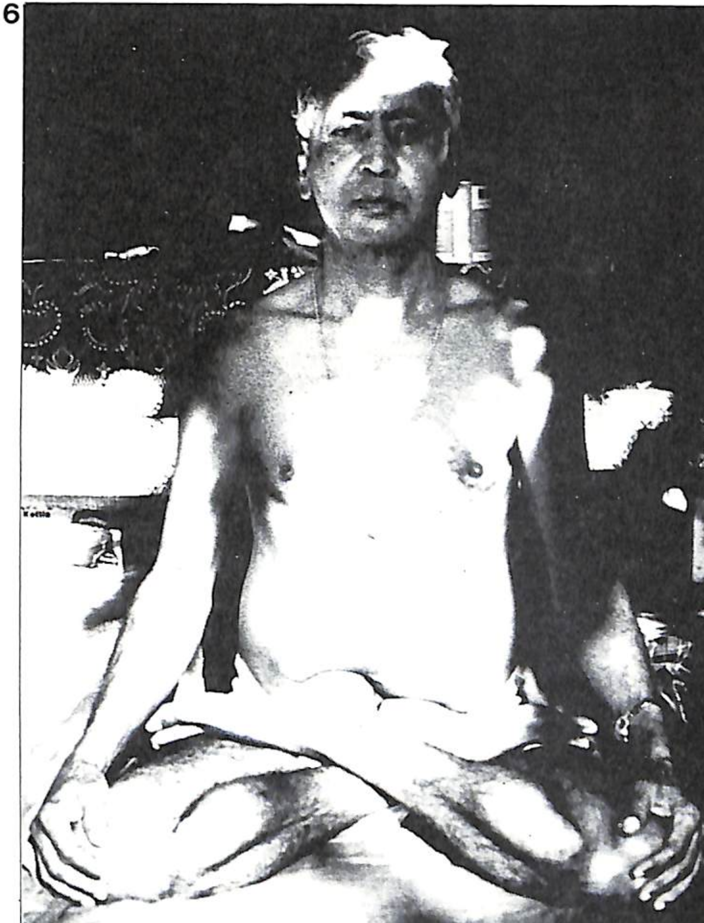
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idea in my mind while I slept. A white woman was rare there. I had almost stumbled out. Mantrums are so powerful; things can be done with them that you wouldn't believe. Sanji quieted down and so did I. Rama went into some incantation and said that the man would regret his actions; his face was awful to see. It seemed that this fellow had seen us walking in the evening and then decided to do this. I pitied him. From then on I wore my hair tied back and my sari all hooded when I walked. I listened when people talked and I learned what magic was in the voodoo sense.

The days passed quickly. I was trying to get used to the "no time" in my mind. That was hard. Time was, and is, only day and night. We got up at dawn, took tea, then bathed in the Ganges with all kinds of ceremony, then took a long walk, followed by breakfast. After breakfast, I took care of

• Photo (1) Alice in meditation; (2–6) Rama teaching proper placement of feet in Padmasan.


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my personal things and mantric practice until lunch. This was very hard mentally as well as physically. Sometimes I thought my head would explode. Then lunch and rest during the real hot part of the day – it was unbearable. If you could last it out, tea was served between five and six o'clock, followed by instense study and evening prayers in Sanskrit until about ten; then some small food and to bed. Sanji had been studying for twenty-five years, so she really set the pace for me. Her devotion to Rama was unbelievable. She instructed me patiently in the womanly things which were so complicated in this wilderness. They were so thoughtful that toilet tissue was brought for me from Delhi. I didn't realize that Indians did not use it and that was the reason they never reached for anything with the left hand. Paper was too expensive – a luxury here. You saw nothing wasted. We ate

•Photo (1–5) Rama doing various Yoga asans at age 70; (6–8) Rama just before morning puja (worship).

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off large banana leaves and I liked that. They were washed and fresh and covered the whole floor in front of you. The rats scared me, but Rama said *"Don't worry, they are country rats – the city rats are the bad ones."* I believed him, so I slept pretty well now, although I still yelled when they ran through my feet during the day.

Rama was the focus of this picture of change for me. He was hard on me sometimes, but when I really was hurting he helped me through it. For a couple of days I had been a little low due to the heat and bugs. Not sick or anything, just "off my wheat paste" as they said here. Anyway, he sent a runner all the way to Haridwar and back – a day's journey on foot – to bring ice for me and he and Sanji and two men all stood around and watched with great delight as the crazy American cried with gratefulness into her iced tea. It tasted divine. I will never forget that glass of tea – and the great effort it took to get it to me.

That day Rama said *"I am your mother and father and your children. Now try and hold on – a few more weeks and you will be over the worst."* I had new heart, despite the heat, and took a swim in the Ganges.

One day after that everyone there made a sacrifice for me to the Goddess Lakshmi, who fulfills all desire. The whole place got up at 4 a.m., just before dawn. The bricks were set on the cleanly swept mud floor; the wood was all brushed off so that no bugs or worms would be burned, and fruit was put around on the mud with bright yellow tumeric and wheat flour. All kinds of flowers were gathered and ghee (melted butter) and cooked rice were prepared; then we all sat facing the morning sun. The clouds were very heavy with rain again so we first said the sun mantrum to remove the rain from the area. Rama, decked in garlands, took his seat in front of the fire. Incense burned on all four corners and he began the

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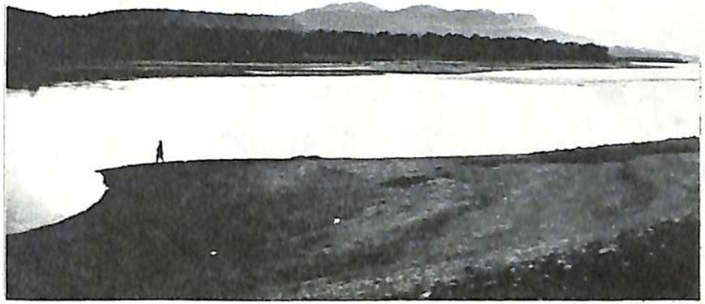


•Photo (1) Alice; (2) Rama bathing in Ganges; (3) Rama displaying tiny Gita he always carried; (4) Rama chanting mantras during fire ceremony; (5) Ganges.

mantric procedure to dedicate me to the Goddess and invoke her blessing on me and mine. The whole process was a long and involved one and a lot of work for everyone, and it was no laughing matter. The clouds cleared up and we had sun and a breeze that day.

At Ram Kunj seven different rivers come together and make up the Mother Ganges. Surrounding us were the dense jungle forests of the foothills of the Himalayas. In the evening we walked down to the river bank and onto the stone dike that these people, with infinite patience, had built to hold back the flood. We could see a few lights at night far down the river valley and these were the lights of Haridwar. The falls in front of the house made a continuously lovely sound.

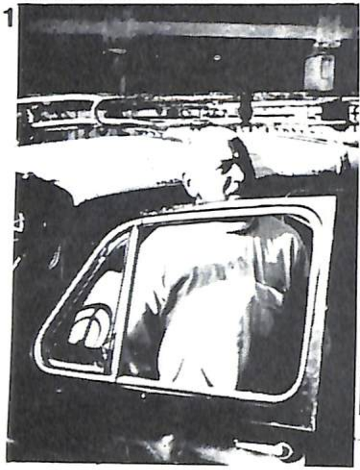
I tried very hard to do exactly the right things so that I would toughen up, but also progress as quickly as I could to get this penance bit over. I had never seen the sky like it was there – so starry and bright, with the Milky Way curving right from horizon to horizon – it was spectacular. We could hear animals thrashing around at night but they did not bother us. A lizard crawled up inside my sari once and I went into sixteen thousand fits. To everyone's delight I threw off my clothes and Sanji got the thing off me. Everyone really broke up over that. Rama laughed, *"Big brave American Yogi!"*



SANJI'S HOUSE

Some great changes took place here one night. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur, millionaires from Ludhianna, came to Ram Kunj. Oh, the food they brought was wonderful – all fresh and so good. They made themselves perfectly at home, sleeping outside and on the floor sometimes. Mrs. Arthur cooked for her husband no matter where he went. He ate only her food, so she cooked on the open fire with hot stones. They brought news that a friend had died in Ludhianna and Swamiji was wanted, so Sanji, Rama, the Arthurs and I set off on the two hundred mile journey. We left at 4 p.m. and Amar Singh, our servant, helped me down the rock dam into an old car which took us to the station. It was almost a perpendicular climb and I was a sight, sari and all. I had to wear shoes of wood most of the time due to my training, but they took pity on me that day and I wore my own; I never would have made it without them. In the station, armless and legless beggars crawled along, begging for food and money to stay alive. Refugees and troops were pouring through; monkeys, huge ones, were stealing everything and the defecations of humans and animals were everywhere. I was taught to walk strictly behind Rama and in front of Sanji. They could only get one train compartment so they gave it to Rama and me. Sanji and the Arthurs rode in a cattle car. You would have to see it to believe it. The windows were all open, but barred, as at every station people crawled all over them trying to beat their way into the compartments. People rode on top of the train and hung onto the bars outside. The soot and flaming cinders came right in the windows; you were always covered with coal and soot and had to watch for fire in your clothes.

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One good thing was that I got to see so much of India at a distance; at sunset it was incredibly beautiful. I saw the straw huts of the villages of the north and the rice paddies and laboring farms. Every ten minutes the train stopped. After a terrible 110 degree night we arrived in Ludhianna at 2:30 a.m., and unpacked. God bless my sleeping bag. We carried complete bedding, mosquito netting and towels everywhere with us. The people were not there to meet us, so we had to take three rickshaws into the black of the night to Sanji's house. If you have not bumped and swayed in one of these fragile carts in the night through the black city, past huge water buffalo, cows, and hills, through narrow, twisting paths that they call roads, you don't know what fear is. We finally made it to Sanji's big old house, three stories high, and Rama took his staff, the sign of a Yogi, and beat on all the gates yelling until they stuck their heads over the roof-top where they all were sleeping.

• Photo (1) Rama beginning a trip; (2) Alice at an afternoon tea; (3) Refugee tents; (4) Indian army personnel; (5) Rama.



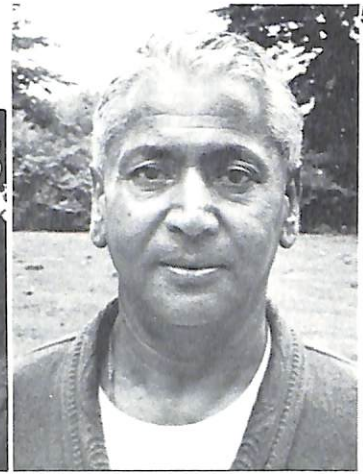
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We woke up Sanji's whole house and everyone fell at Rama's feet in joy that he bothered to grace their home at any hour. We were taken, tired and covered with soot, up four long flights of steep steps to the roof. There, cots were spread for us and dirty clothes and all, I fell into my cot under the stars, in between Rama, Sanji and the rest of the family and servants. I remember feeling that I was near the end of my endurance. The sky was all stars and I don't remember anything else. The next thing I knew Rama was beating my foot saying, *"Come on, come on, the car is here."* Sanji was pleading with him to let me sleep, but he said I had slept three hours and that was enough. I crawled out, still dirty and stiff with grime and they rushed me down the steps and out the front where there was a car waiting from the Chief Justice's home. Due to a mix-up in telegrams they had not expected us until 6 a.m. Off we went, leaving Sanji at her own home for awhile, and just close by, we drove into a yard about as big as a city block. All kinds of ornate houses of a faded yellow color were in it, and peacocks strolled about the gardens. Long galleries of marble and smooth cement lined the house and big walls surrounded the whole thing with climbers, or night visitors. More "Hail to the King", and foot kissing, and then I was taken to a palatial room with a separate dressing room, a white pot and a cup.

There was no 'flush' here. I hated to use that pot and leave it sitting, but I did. Somehow, very secretly, they knew when the pot was used because it was emptied at once. I never caught them, nor did they catch me. Now, I realized what a big thing that 'flush' at Ram Kunj was. I washed at once and breakfast was served. We had fruit, milk, and the luxury of coffee. Rama told them, *"She has had a few extremely hard days; this will rest her a little before the next ones,"* so I was babied and treated like a queen.

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If I could only tell you of the deep feelings these people have for their saints: Rama's rooms were only used by him, even though he might not visit them for a year or more. The rooms were shrines and people went there to worship. His picture was on every wall in every house I visited. A judge of the Supreme Court of India told me, *"We have faith in our saints; they are our real leaders. I put all my problems before him. We in India would lose hope without his teachings."* It was incredible to me that through it all Rama stayed the same – laughing at himself and me – dragging me all over. This was an incredible adventure. I could never have dreamed of this the way it was.

One night there was a bright moon and all the Indian people gathered in the streets, strangely quiet from the usual noise and roar of the days and nights I had seen. Every once in awhile someone had a radio, a rare thing here, and all would gather in silence waiting for the words of the war.

About 4 a.m., a huge explosion shook the city. I didn't know what it was, but the peacocks in the bushes around my bed cried and cried. Rama's bed was put near mine and the guard walked around us at night. It gave me the strangest feeling to hear them say, *"Everything depends on President Johnson now. America will not allow this war; we must have faith in him (Johnson) and remain calm."* Why bomb a bunch of mudhole streets full of cattle and starving people? No machines except human hands; no arsenal or weapons; women carried cement on their heads; bricks were crushed by hand with an old hammer. What was the use of winning here?

Seeing that old palace in the moonlight was like a dream: all twelve arches in the front pavilion and the birds of the night and the night flowers blooming. I walked in the gardens around and around where Persian kings had once walked. Now I prayed for our safe return to the jungle and wilderness.

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•Photo (1) Rama talking with Alice.

A plane carrying paratroopers was shot down right near us in Ludhianna. We had been there about ten days.The terrible crash shook the earth; it was awful. It was just at dawn and a complete blackout was in effect. Things were pretty bad. For the first time in my life I heard an air raid siren that meant business; it was an awful feeling. The war front had moved to within ten miles of us. All Americans were ordered out of Punjab to Delhi. Rama decided to go ahead with our plans to try to get a train to the U.P. district and contact the American Embassy from there. Late at night, in complete darkness, although the moon was very bright, we had dinner served to us in the garden. It was beautiful, with the old crumbly palace shining in the moonlight. Mr. and Mrs. Nath, our hosts, presented me with a beautiful handwoven silk sari of pale lavender and a new pen. The servants packed all our things; including some precious food, honey, jam, limes and oatmeal in the car; and we were wished a safe journey. Mr. and Mrs. Nath were wringing their hands about me, but Rama told them, *"She has come fifteen thousand miles to learn Yoga. No war will stop that. She will be all right."*

The train station was horrible. Troops were everywhere. There were no lights and people were lying all over the ground. Finally we found our compartment and in it was a family with five children. The Naths had hung beautiful garlands of flowers around our necks and the smell of the flowers saved the day for me. The filth was awful. We protested, but the family said they would get out at the next station – about two hours up the line – so we all climbed in, fleas and all. Mr. Nath and his brother loaded our bags and the train started. The heat was about 100 degrees and these old trains showered coal soot with every puff. After two hours of stop and go, the family in our car left us by the side window; it turned out that they hadn't any tickets at all – they had just grabbed our places. Rama said a few words about them, and we lay on the two boards and stood the heat and dirt for nine more hours. I never thought that Haridwar could look as good as it did that morning. Our train came through safely. One train was bombed on a bridge and that scared me. Dirty and tired, we grabbed a tonga (horse and buggy) and took off into the jungle for Ram Kunj. The place looked so beautiful to me. The air was fresh for it had just rained. The river was singing its timeless song and I crawled into my cot and died for awhile. That evening was quiet – no planes here – and there were letters from Ishbel, Mother and Lincoln. I was happy about that. I read and re-read them and fell asleep again. We heard over the radio that the war was still bad and even here all was kept dark.

The next morning I was feeling pretty good again. The weather was so hot, the only way I could cool off was to lay in the river. The Ganges is very cold because the water is melted snow from a glacier high in the Himalayas. I never left camp alone, Rama was always watching me so closely, constantly on guard. We usually took a walk down to the river and I would swim in a clearing in the rocks. I had become so familiar with it that I threw myself into the pool without looking carefully, and fell right into the lap of a dead man. The half-eaten corpse was caught in between the rocks. His bloodless head bobbed up and down, as his body was in a sitting position. I froze in horror. I started to scream and couldn't stop. Rama pulled me out of the water and I lay

UNCHANGEABILITY

crying on the banks of the river. Rama looked long and hard at me that day. I can still see his brilliant eyes staring at me. He said, *"so that's it, Alice, you are really terrified of death. You must be ready to face death at anytime now."* I tried to think that I was ready, but I knew my fears were only hidden. My American outlook of death and age had to go, I realized that more than ever now, but the shock was still there.

Somehow from somewhere a wind blew and we had a rest from the heat and flies. Later Rama took me to Haridwar for supplies and I got my mind settled down. Those wild rickshaw rides will take your mind off anything.

Things became pretty quiet. Some war news, but no signs of it where we were. The sun was bright and hot and my clothes were drying on the line. The flowers, although it was near the end of the season, were still quite pretty.

It was still terribly hot; we sat in front of a fan on the little verandah, almost unable to move. The evenings are nice, however, and I move better then. While I was swimming one day a big black snake went by in the current. Rama said it was a black cobra – a sign of Shiva, who wears one around his neck. It surely was a sign to me to get out of there fast!

One cloudy day we had to go to Dehra Dun to deliver some tapes Rama had brought for someone there. On our way back we stopped at the hospital in Rishekesh where Sivananda had lived. It was quite a thrill to see the places I had thought about so much. It was beautiful there, high in the mountains overlooking the valley of the Ganges. I rode an Indian bus for the first time. What an experience! You just could not imagine the way things were tied together with strings. I had never seen such telephones as I saw in the town bank, bare wires all around with string hanging from them. A shovel was so precious that a man slept with it at night. There were no tools but wooden ones. People labored and sweated for hours doing what we could do in an hour with our equipment. I understood why the English ladies did not live long in India. There were graves all along the way.

The heat grew a little less during the last part of September. Each day I did five thousand mantras, then tried to keep my things in repair from the devastating rats. I did my wash, then two or three hours of study of the Bhagavad-Gita – Sanskrit to English (this was the most interesting part of the day), then long exercises and other processes that were supposed to open all nerve channels in my body. I tried not to think about food as we were lucky to have any at all, and I could not help but be thankful for it. Starvation was all around. Sometimes days went by and I never left the compound at all. I walked back and forth on the mud paths and stayed within twenty paces. You could not imagine how it was to be so turned to the inside. It was like having yourself dissected before your own eyes. I felt no unhappiness in it; quite the other way. I felt I was gaining. I didn't know exactly what, but somehow when I went to bed, I was peaceful and quiet. I watched the moon rise over the mountains and my mind was at rest with itself.

All power was gone – the war was very bad. I wondered if our people back home got the real news about how devastating it had become. Dr. Kulkarni wanted us to come south as he was afraid we were not safe, but the railway traffic was impossible now. We would have to chance it. The American Embassy was informed of my whereabouts and I knew they would contact me. We would go south in November after my severe training period was over.

People were stripping leaves off the trees and eating them. Some days I walked through it in a kind of numb state, because if one allowed all the sorrows of mankind to bleed from him, one would have to die.

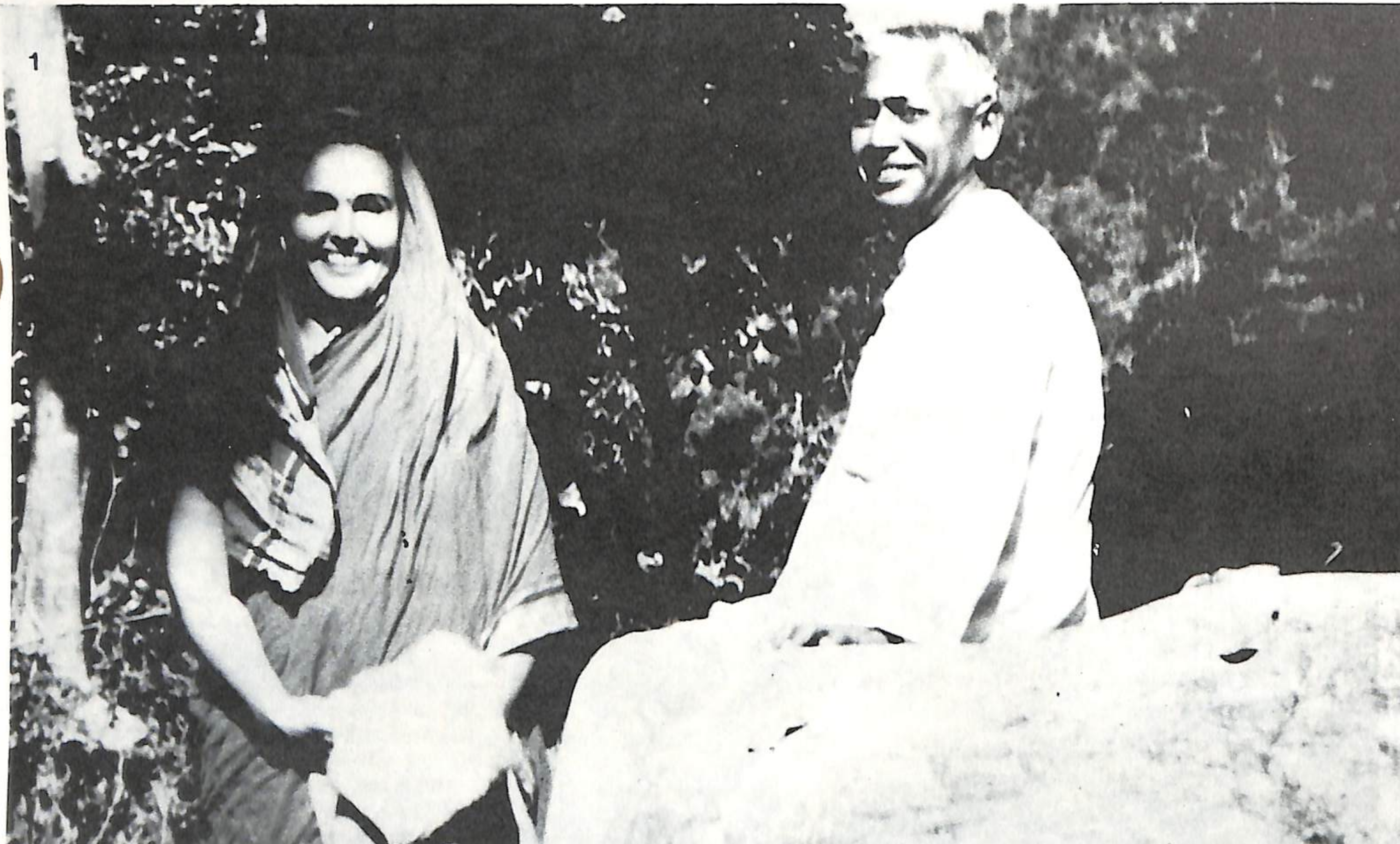
Of course, the first question from the guru to the student is *"Are you ready to die?"* If not, there could be no training

•Photo (1) Alice and Swami Rama at a hill station above Rishikesh.

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like this. You had to know that all there was in this life must be like a straw in the wind, ever changing, never being able to find anything that really lasts. Youth goes, children die, death comes, and what do you really know about life after all? Oddly enough a great sense of peace and happiness had come over me. There was really no death now; time was an invention of the mind. There was one thing underlying all things —unchangeability—and it was there. The secret lies in the Self (Atman), so close and yet so hard to find; I got a glimpse of it once in awhile, and I can tell you — there is reason to live after all.

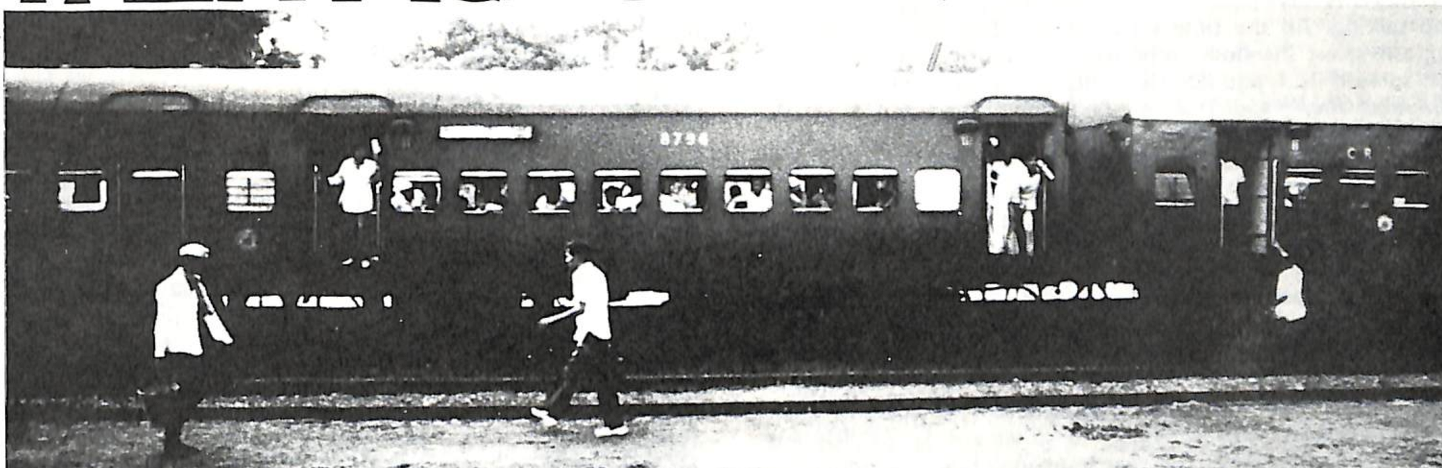
• Photo (1) Alice and Rama in Himalayas; (2) Indian train.

We received word from Dr. Kulkarni that he was making plans for us in the south, down in Mysore State. Every year Rama made a long trek across India, seeing all the people that were his devotees. He visited large cities, remote villages and small towns, some of them very difficult to get to. Rama told me that our quiet period in the jungle must break for awhile and he hoped that I was strong enough now to go on such a long journey with him. I argued that we shouldn't go now, still anxious to be undisturbed in the great solitude and deep study that had become natural to me. He stated that we must.

We left in the night. It was about 10 p.m., and the sky was

TREK ACROSS INDIA

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clear, with stars dotting the heavens. The huge Himalayan range spread all around us with the moon just rising over the crests. Two rickshaw men came for us and Rama and his bags were put in one and my things in the other. I hated to leave Ram Kunj, because it had become home to me. I looked back with sadness as we went down the path and I tried to catch a last glimpse of it in the warm night. However my guru was right behind me looking right into my face and smiling. With that, I looked straight ahead and off we went.

We took the train from Haridwar to Delhi and arrived early in the morning to be greeted by Dr. Kelkar and Rama's friends. They took us to Kelkar's home and it was nice to see them all again. They marvelled that I was still able to take the hard jungle life without being sick or complaining, but they also saw that I wasn't much for talking these days. He told them, *"I think she will make it."*

I went off by myself so that no one would see how proud I was. Many days passed in Delhi with Rama working, working and talking. All the time I was at his elbow, sometimes falling asleep on the floor to be wakened gently and put on my cot to rest. If I was not there he would say, *"Where is she? Where is she?"* and I would be brought to stand in attendance for many more hours.

Then we boarded a train from Delhi and went to the south, stopping at various places all along the way. In the middle of the night as the train would come to a station, Rama would pull me out of my seat and we would brush ourselves into a somewhat respectable-looking condition. We went out on the platform where people had gathered hours before just to get a glimpse of him. They would push food into my hands, smile at me shyly, and kiss Rama's feet. The crush of the crowds everywhere was great. Then we'd get back in the unbelievably slow train and try to catch a few winks of sleep before our next stop. Everyday or so we got off to visit and lecture to large groups and visit someone's home, where reverence was shown for Rama and great curiosity for me. I was like a toy doll; clothes were arranged for me, I was fed a certain way, walked a certain way; wound up each day and set in one direction to keep going until the spring had run down. All this time I hardly spoke but kept my practices and disciplines going just as I had at Ram Kunj. Rama constantly watched me, guided me, directed me and pushed me just to my limit each day.

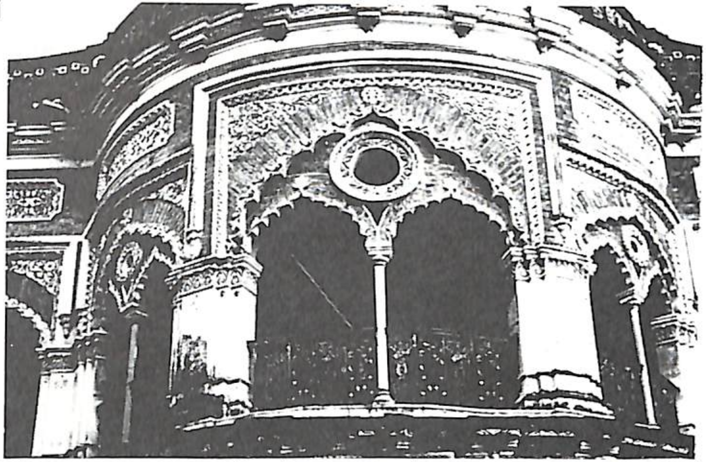
We had nice living quarters in Bombay, a lovely, progressive city. We stayed with a doctor who was a devotee of Rama's. From there we went on the Deccan Queen to Poona. Again we were met and taken to a lovely house high in the hills surrounding Poona. I was given a room on the top of the house, three floors up, with an open stone stairway that wound up from the rest of the house. The birds flew in and out of my little room and the parrots hung in the treetops around me. On a distant hill, the temple of the Goddess Parvati, or Earth Mother, looked like a painting out of a dim memory. There was no road to the temple, so pilgrims climbed a very difficult and tortuous way to get to its gate. I watched them with great interest and awe.

In my room was a plain white iron bed, with netting all around for mosquitoes; a deer skin for me to meditate on and a mirror completed the furnishings. The floors, made of huge blocks of slate, were cool and restful to the feet. The bathroom was a large slate room, with a piece of stone in the middle on which to sit while pouring water over one's self. The latrine was another room which had a stone floor with a large hole in the center.

Poona was a lovely place, so green and quiet. Sometime before, a huge dam broke and people were still talking of the thousands who died in the flood. Rama talked and lectured

• Photo (1) ornate balcony of old palace; (2) young brahmins mashing rice with a large stone for religious feast.

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on and on. I wondered how he could keep that up just like a machine. He was in his sixties, but never tired.

One day Rama told me to dress very specially in a lovely sari, and the ladies braided flowers in my hair. Every lady in Poona wore fresh flowers in her hair. This was one of the loveliest customs. We were taken with an entourage to a factory in the city – a lumber company. The wood shavings were swept aside in a curving path and beautiful glowing oriental rugs were put down for us to walk through the workshops. There in the center of the work area, with all the tools and lumber lying around, two throne-like chairs were sitting in the midst of a pile of flowers. We were seated in them and flower garlands hung around our necks. All the workers in the factory and the owners came and kissed Rama's feet and bowed to me.

The language was very different here and I was unable to understand anything. Up to this time I had been to able pick out a little Hindi to help me. Then milk was poured for everyone and more flowers were given to me. All the beggars, the people on the street and around the shops were given food and there was great happiness. Rama then explained, during a lull, that the factories had been completely demolished during the flood, and now his blessings were needed to help them rebuild the prosperity of the town.

RAMĀ

Rama gave me the name of Ramā. The accent is on the last syllable. The word denotes the female, and the name of the Goddess of Plenty, Beauty, and Health. It is not pronounced the same as my guru's name, although the spelling seems to

be the same. It seemed that my presence there added a great deal to the occasion and as the representative of the Goddess, and as Shiva's sacrifice, it was an auspicious time. Once every ten thousand years a human sacrifice was needed for Shiva's grace. I was one of them. My life now was an instrument for him. How strange this sounded to my American ears. Sacrifices still brought to mind the Aztecs and the sun and that stone knife plunged into the heart. I felt far removed from the Ohio "Corn Country"; still I watched and listened and tried to understand. It was so different from my past life. I felt a great responsiblity about them calling me their Ramā Devi – Goddess Ramā. Suddenly every moment and every word had meaning of a type I had never known before. The power I felt building up in me seemed to almost consume me at times. My mind was centering down to it more and sometimes I felt as though I couldn't stand the pull anymore, the pressure was so great. Even though weak in the body, I was strong in the mind. My body did not seem to really be part of me at all – just something there like a shadow and evanescent as vapor.

We went deep into the inner city, where the poor lived in housing that one would find inadequate in the United States. We are so rich, we Americans. We were taken along a narrow street into a temple where there was a beautiful statue of a big black goddess with jewels in her forehead. Her face was streaked with red and her eyes were black shining stones. Incense smoked and burned before her feet and goats were tethered at the door. I was seated in a chair before her and a woman threw herself on my feet and began to kiss them. People swarmed in and piled children on me, filling my arms with them. They grasped at my sari and pulled it half off me. They screamed some sanskrit over and over and I sat there in stunned shock at what was happening. Rama called for the men who had brought us and they formed a line to get



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me out. All this time the people were shouting and pulling at me and grasping my toes so that I could not walk. We pushed our way to the car that had brought us and one woman threw her child into my lap through the car window. He looked at me with bewildered eyes and began to sob in terror he was no more frightened than I was. I forced him back into her arms and we finally drove through the mob and out of the narrow streets. My face was ashen; I would not speak. Tears started and Rama gave me a hard look. He was silent for a moment, then he said, *"Now – you see yourself as you really are."*

I went to my little stone room with the plain white iron bed. I looked at the temple on the hill and for a few days I didn't do much. Everyone was kind as always and

•Photo (1) Alice doing evening meditation; (2) large gathering of Indian men and women in temple; (3) temple statue of the Goddess Durga riding a lion.

watched over me like a baby. I got used to this. Sometimes I thought of home and my two boys and my insides ached. Crazy things that my husband, Lincoln, and I had said to each other went around in my head and sometimes I thought I heard his voice calling me. Actually, what is real, and what is unreal? For me it was hard to tell then. Fragments of Shakespeare's beautiful lines flashed through my mind:

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
. . . shall dissolve, and . . .
Leave not a track behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

Then I thought: There is too much order in the universe to let everything end in death. The secret lay hidden, but I was convinced the answer was to be had if I but looked for it. The "Razor's Edge" is not a joke. The path of life is like that but somehow, in spite of everything, I never felt for one instant that I could not find the way if I sought for it. I thought: If I can just hold out I know the *"Light of Yoga'* will make my path clear.

Who knows when the myth that we are begins to emerge: Time is an invention of the mind to keep one occupied until this moment comes. Then, as all else in life leaves, everything that one knows as real, leaves too. It is the last hold on a person. The long dream that Sivananda spoke of many years ago was now the only reality.

I wrote a long letter to my mother, and she wrote back: *"Who really knows what happens? You were a beautiful child, and now are a beautiful woman. We loved you from the moment you were born and we love you now. Nothing has ever been any different than that. Sometimes the language is different."*

At times everything seemed to stop for me those days, even the thought of Yoga in my mind. Gradually I could look in a mirror and comb my hair and talk to people a little again, and the gentle Indians around me babied me along. They saw all their beliefs in me, and I knew nothing of those beliefs.

ELEPHANT COUNTRY

We visited a queen in Poona. Her summer palace was very grand and a throne room was kept for Rama. It was hung with yellow satin and huge yellow satin cushions were for his seat. A large beautiful rug covered the floor, and he took his seat in solitary grandeur to begin his lectures and teachings. I sat on the far edge of the huge room and dreamed away the time. Suddenly a hand touched me. It was the little princess of the

• Photo (1) young elephant; (2) map of India showing the journey to South and back plus Ludhiana; (3) Alice in home of Indian disciples.

family. She motioned to me to lean closer and then she whispered, *"Do you know how to twist?"*

Our last night there was on the large beautiful roof top of Dr. Chandrataya's house. All of Rama's devotees who could crowd in were there. Soft carpets were put down for sitting and the moon was full and bright. There were candlelight, musicians, and lots of food. There were many tears too, as people saw their Master getting ready to depart. I could respect this feeling. After his speech the music began in earnest, and, carried away with the rhythm of it, Rama reached for the cover of a typewriter box and began to play it like a drum. People sang with all their hearts, and his joyous feeling for the music was so captivating that we were all filled with it.

We left Poona about midnight to go further south to elephant country. The people brought fruits and bread for us. We boarded the most notorious train in India – the only one



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going south from Poona – which chugged along so slowly that for exercise one hopped off and walked along beside the coach and then hopped on to rest again. The running time was sixteen hours for every 100 miles – stopping for every cow and scorpion on the way. Two men shared our dusty compartment, which was the best on the train. It was hot, and we had to keep all the windows closed to keep out the burning sparks and smoke from the engine.

As I tried to sleep I watched the coals and fire hit the window, and finally drifted off. I woke in the dawn to see the windows filled with faces of men; every bar was grabbed and the men had crawled on the outside and clung to the car to get a ride. How long they rode depended on their strength. Their strained faces looked in the windows at my lying on my bunk, and I felt terrible. They hung on desperately as the train picked up speed and one by one they dropped along the way. I don't know how long they rode that way, all dressed

in rags and clutching terribly to get to someplace. Rama told me to turn over and hide my face, which I did. I had to – I couldn't look anymore.

All along the way starving children approached the train window begging for scraps of food. One little boy waited patiently with his little shirt held out in front of him like an apron, while a man scraped what was left from his plate and his wife's tray into the boy's shirt. Then the boy went to a bench and ate it all as I watched. I was unable to take my eyes off him, thinking of apples in Ohio lying on the green grass unwanted and tomatoes rotting on the ground never to be used at all. I spent many hours thinking about my garbage can. It was a great shame to me –forty gallons a week of waste. Here people took each tin can, if they were lucky enough to find one, and used them for their roofs, all neatly placed to keep out the rain. Banana leaves were used for dishes. They were washed and the the food was put on them.


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Dr. Kulkarni met us at Belgaum and drove us the rest of the way by car. His house was filled with relatives – one sister-in-law served me. My bed was put outside in the yard with much discussion as to how I was to be guarded. Women here were very hidden and shy because of it. We had a good talk with Dr. Kulkarni and I noticed there were all men – no women. They were peeking all around through the doorways, but there was no sign of recognition; so I went to bed. I crawled in under the netting and rolled over a couple of times, and then I realized that in the dark all around my cot stood the women. One was the spokesman – in English – and gave a running translation to the others.

I don't know how but they had looked at everything I

owned. If I needed a blouse they knew which case to go to. How they did it, I did not even know myself. The questions and soft laughter went on into the night: all about my life in America, all about the children in school, did I like India, where was my mother, and why was she not with me? Then they began to tell me how they were trying to go to school, that India's temples were covered with plates of gold in the old days, and now with help from America and their leaders India would again become strong and beautiful.

I looked forward to seeing Dr. Kulkarni in his own house. I remembered the supper that he had served me in Cleveland – one boiled cauliflower liberally laced with tumeric and some orange juice that he mixed with his finger in my glass. The vegetarian food did not bother me in India. I had been a vegetarian long before, and I was used to it. Something did bother me though, because after we left Poona, I could not eat anymore. I would try, simply to stay strong enough for the ordeal of the traveling we were doing, but somehow I could not swallow food. Gently the ladies tried to coax me, giving me a morsel they thought would appeal to me. I, knowing how precious every bite was there, tried desperately to eat, but I could not. I began to long for the quiet of the Himalayas and my grass hut in the jungle. Even the thought of the rats began to sound good to me. I would dream of the clear cold water of Rama's well in Ram Kunj, and I awoke from sleep calling for my family – seeing them there sometimes and then realizing it was part of a dream just fading from sight. I had loved it in the jungle. It was a lot like Mentor Swamp when my parents first moved there with me when I was a child. The fish in the Ganges would eat out of my hands, and the chanting at night by the Indians to keep the elephants out of the sugar cane fields lulled me to sleep.

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• Photo (1) Curious Indian village women; (2) monkey boy performing; (3) street vendor selling baked corn; (4) old women stringing flower garlands; (5) shopkeeper selling tiny images of the Gods.

I got used to never talking to anyone but Rama and he went on as always, lecturing and working with his other disciples.

Mrs. Kulkarni took me in her arms and loved me. She said, *"You poor child, so far from your mother and your children,"* and she put me to bed. How sweet they were – how hard life was there. Dr. Kulkarni was president of the college in that town. He worked very hard, but all the knowledge he gained in the United States could not be used there for lack of equipment. Still, he worked as well as he could. Indians are devoted to their country and they will give all they have for the protection of their freedom. Progress is slow and it will be a long haul. It is such a beautiful country with wide fields and plains, but they need fertilizer and tools so badly.

A wealthy farmer came to take us to his field one night. It was a long way. I no longer paid any attention to where I was going; I was trying hard just to put one foot in front of the other. My strength was going. We walked far back into plowed lands where a tent was pitched. Lovely rugs were spread on the freshly turned ground for us to sit on.

Tea was served to us by the farmer's wife and then by servants to the rest of the group. Rama was called to bless the fields so that they would yield a rich harvest the coming year. We walked and chanted and then were given huge hunks of sugar cane, brown sweet peanuts roasted in the fire in front of us, then more scalding tea. The moon was rising in the sky.

The days were so hot in India that most everything was done in the evening or at twilight. The bullocks with painted horns stood swaying at the carts, their bells jingling from the harnesses. There was the peculiar smell of India at night, very sweet and almost drugging in a way. A woman picked up her sleeping baby from a pile of soft grass and we went our way home in the line of carts and animals in the cool of the night after a full day. I shall always remember that night as one of the most beautiful in my life. I slept well.

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This is the field my Guru and I were taken to in order to bless the ground for a hearty crop that warm night in 1964. It was not until 1974 when I returned to this village with Dr. Kulkarni and my students that Dr. Kulkarni related this story: "Alice do you remember how you and Swamiji came here to bless this field in 1964? Well, that summer was the beginning of three years of drought in this district. All of the large cows died of the intense heat, many died from famine. But this field was a lifesaver for the village. When you and Rama were here it was the first planting of this field and it was not expected to yield an edible crop for another growing season which would be the following spring. The drought set in and all of the other surrounding fields died out, but miraculously this field not only continued to grow but it yielded a crop every 15 days and the entire village was sustained by it through a very rough time. The villagers still talk about that time." I had not heard about this until 10 years after we walked through there and it was a delight and a testament to the magnitude of my dear Guru's powerful grace.

• Photo (1) on the road to the village; (2) beautiful bullock resting in the afternoon heat; (3) villagers.

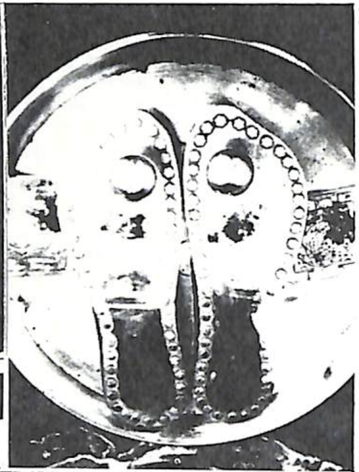
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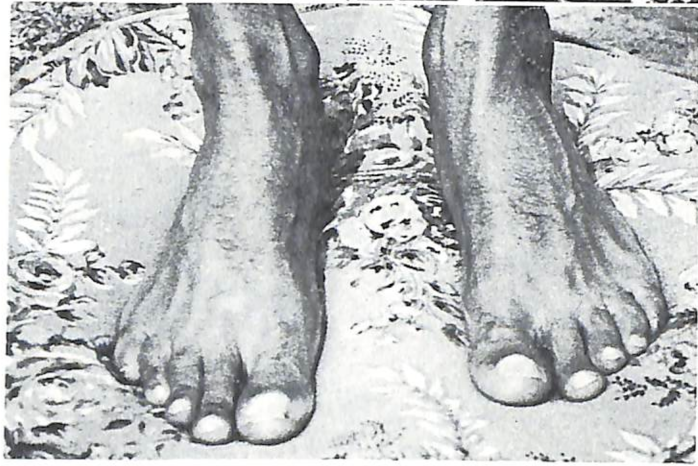


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•Photo (1) Rama dressed in his usual white dhoti and long white Indian shirt; (2) silver plated sandals that Rama used to wear. These are worshipped daily in Kulkarni's home; (3) the feet of the master, worshipped by thousands. To Yogis the Guru's feet are held in reverence and the custom of bowing to touch the feet of holy personages is as old as India itself, it is called "taking the dust from the feet of the master." (4) Dr. V. G. Kulkarni and his wife Shakuntala, performing Satya Narayanaya Puja; (5) Rama (center), Kulkarni, to Rama's left, and gathering of village pundits and devotees in Sholapur.

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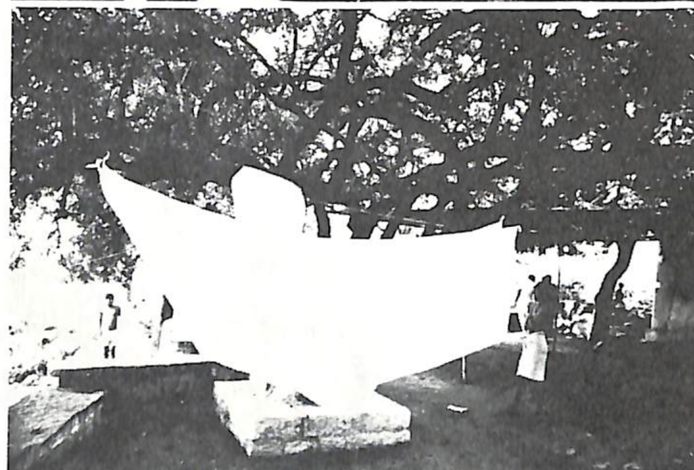
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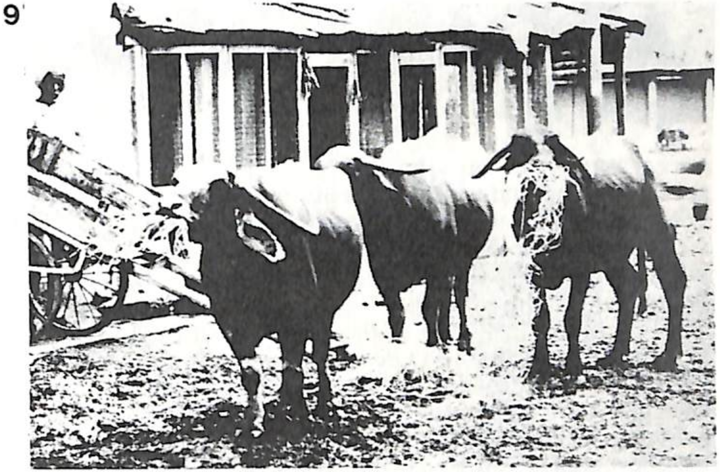
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•Photo (1) Village girls carrying water pots and young school children; (2) stone statue of Hanuman, the monkey God. Hanuman is very popular in South India as he is worshipped as the greatest devotee of Lord Rama from the Ramayana; (3) Stone statue of Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati and Ganesha. Lord Shiva's vehicle the bull, Nandi is at the bottom; (4) working woman loading 20 heavy bricks on her head; (5) the dhoti is very common apparel for a man in India. It is several yards of cloth wrapped around and up between the legs, tucked in at the top; (6) after washing in the river a dhoti is hung in a "live oak" to dry in the afternoon breeze; (7–8) musicians playing during evening kirtan (chanting); (9) large water buffalo taking up the entire street with their afternoon meal.

APPARITION

We were to go on toward Calcutta. A rajah was waiting there for Rama and me, but I could not go on. My body was becoming emaciated, and my strength was nearly gone. The water here in the south was not good. The Kulkarnis nursed me along and Rama was sick with worry over me. He cancelled the rest of his trip and sent quick messages to the places where he could not make his appointments. (I shudder when I think of their thoughts that I had been the cause of his not coming.)

The Kulkarnis took us to the nearest train that we could take to return to Bombay and then on up to Delhi, and the now dear jungles. I lay on the board seat and managed to live somehow. Rama was always there if I woke or cried out – he was always there. He still is.

Finally after days of travel we arrived in Delhi and I rested in bed at Dr. Kelkar's. It was decided that I should take Dr. Chandrataya's car up to the camp with us. It was better than another train; I could not face another Indian train. I felt that I could drive anything with wheels and I was feeling stronger steadily as we went north. Rama bragged, *"Oh, she is a fine driver – in the States we go eighty miles an hour all the time."* Poor Dr. Chandratraya mentally kissed his car goodbye, and we started. The roads there were not too good to say the least. If we went twenty-five or thirty miles an hour we thought we were really traveling. The horn had to be blown constantly as the roads were meant for everything except cars. Sometimes I got tired of blowing it and taped it down. We had left early in the evening and were well on our way into the jungle country by midnight. The night was quite dark. Suddenly the car did not seem to be handling right. I got out to check, and

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sure enough we had a flat tire. I had asked if everything had been checked before we left and was assured that it had been. I was really in a quandary – I had never changed a tire in my life. In the U.S., if I had a flat tire, I would stand next to it looking helpless and sooner or later some nice fellow came along and changed it for me. At any rate, I remembered my older son telling me before I left that I should learn to change a tire in case I had to do it – that someone was not always going to come along. The words rang in my ears then as I realized where I was. We stood there for a few minutes when suddenly we heard a whistle. A man came riding out of the dark on a bike, he stopped, and asked what the trouble was. We explained. He said he was a mechanic on his way to the temple for worship, and that he would gladly change the tire for us. No pay was needed, for it would be his sacrifice to God. Well, it takes all kinds, and in a few minutes we were

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• Photo (1) statue of Lord Shiva in fountain in Haridwar; (2) wandering sadhus or "holy men" travel in roving bands around India. As Swami Rama used to say, "Most of these men are just beggars. Many are ruffians. Some are worse. Shankaracharya would weep if he saw the state of affairs his order has become. Even so, for every thousand fools wandering around begging, there is one pure genius. Because of this one great soul, India supports the lot."

on our way again.

I was feeling pretty well from my rest in Delhi, but as we drove on that night, I knew something was wrong. By the time we got to Ram Kunj I was so weak that I could hardly get to my rope cot. Rama set up a mosquito net around it out in the open and I sank into a long night of strange sleep. Unconsciousness came and went very sweetly; no fear of passing out, with that last flurry of the heartbeat and all that, just a quiet nothingness. I would wake now and then to see Rama walking around me and chanting. He walked until the sun rose and then I fell into a deep sleep and did not wake again that day or night.

The water here was good – so cold, so clear. I reveled in it. In a few weeks, I was on my feet again. One day we went into the mountains and on to a high bridge made for pilgrims to cross. It swung in the wind and far below the river cut a narrow streak in the rock. I edged out on it much to the delight of my guru, who danced and ran ahead of me. Just then a monkey grabbed my sari and hung on for a free ride. I was too terrified to let go to brush him off and the brute knew it; he hung on all the way. Everyone had another good laugh at the brave American Yogi that day.

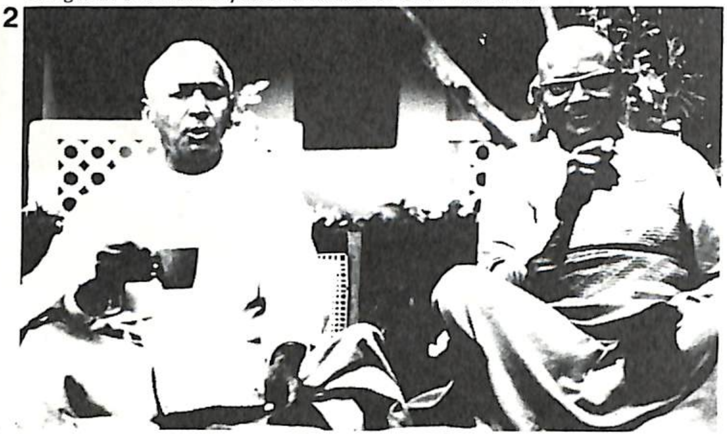
The days went on. I knew the Thanksgiving harvest was coming at home, and the thought of all that food on the American table filled me with pride and a longing that somehow these people should know some of that bounty. I spoke of going home and Rama tried not to notice. Then I mentioned it again, and he said, *"Oh wait a little while,"* and I did not speak of it again. Life was very sweet and quiet there. Sometimes in these active hectic days that I live now, I pull off into some corner of my mind and try to remember that time in the most minute detail. I hear Rama's voice calling, *"Wake up, tea is ready. Will you sleep the day away? It is already five o'clock."* Five o'clock in the morning is the nicest

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• Photo (1) Rama slicing medicinal cactus for Alice to eat; (2) Rama and head Swami of Parmath Ashram at tea in Saptasarovar; (3) Alice by the Ganges in the Himalayas at the cave of Shri Vashista.

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time of day in India.

My recovery not only brought back my health, but also a new vigor and happiness. I went on with my training with a new fullness and tried to put my mind to it with all the concentrated power I could muster.

I could feel the pull of home. My mind was happy though, in the thought that I would soon be done. I tried not to think of leaving Rama. All sorts of clever thoughts went through my mind on how to entice him to come to the United States with me. He was usually bright and gay these days. I think he was as glad as I was to be back in his beloved ashram, Ram Kunj.

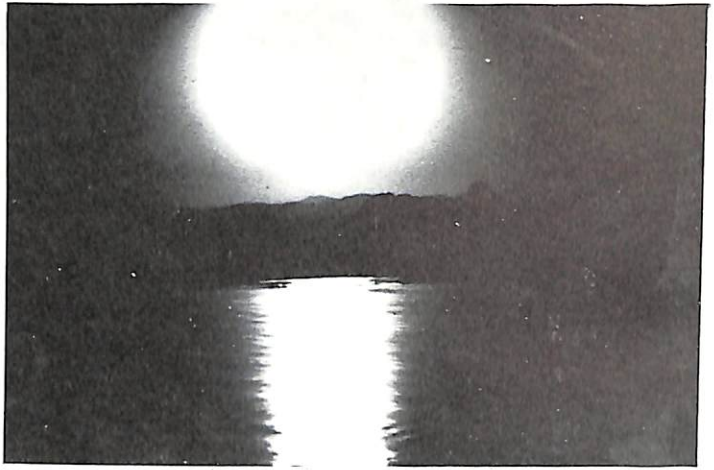
His flower gardens were lovely and as we sat drinking our morning tea and looking at the rising sun, I could see his dark beautiful eyes looking so deeply at me, musing for a moment before he said, *"Why are you so beautiful this morning? Your happiness shines around you like a golden glow."* Life had great meaning then. The words of an old book on Yoga came to mind:

> *"Without loving a thing, that is, making it the sole object of one's devotion, one cannot really know it. Hence the whole world constantly worships — the scientist worships, the philosopher, the artist, all constantly worship. The heart which does not worship is that which is called ignorant."*

The real basis of a person lies waiting so patiently, so long — seemingly asleep. Then as it begins to move, all you ever thought you were dissolves as it approaches. Love begins; love in such depth that at first you cannot stand it. Then the long oblivion of the throbbing universe begins.

I lay in my cot that night still filled with the happy experience of the day that had passed. The Himalayan sky was indescribable with its stars so bright and close. I lay with my hands under my head and silently looked up trying always to remember what they looked like. I thought of all the great

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yogis who had lived in these mountains at one time, and how odd it was that a Midwestern American like myself was following so closely in their footsteps. The roar of the icy clear Ganges was like music. Rama came over to see if I was covered against the mosquitoes and wished me sweet dreams.

The camp became very quiet and I drifted off into the beginning of sleep. As I lay there, I saw an apparition begin to form next to me. It began very suddenly and was glowing tremendously. I was no longer frightened by these things and I watched carefully to see what it was. Suddenly, my husband's face bent over me and looked into my eyes. He was weeping. I can remember putting my arms around his chest and hugging him to me. He kissed me tenderly and said, *"Good-bye, good-bye,"* and suddenly I saw a car careening down a black cinder road, going madly into the night. He was gone. I screamed his name, trying to get him back, but he was gone. I awoke; the stars shone above me just the same, I was

in Ram Kunj. I left my cot crying and sobbing my heart out. Rama came running to see what had happened and I tried to sob the story out to him. He was very quiet then, and finally said, *"You see, Alice, we never really understand when the time comes."*

Heartbroken, I paced up and down the paths of our camp. The night was silent. Finally my grief became bearable and I went to lie down in my cot, wide-eyed, thinking, remembering, until dawn came. I think I knew then what was to happen, although one did not like to admit knowing sometimes.

RAMA LIVES

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I was not prepared when Rama clutched his chest, turned deathly pale, and dropped to the floor that afternoon. We put him on his cot and tried desperately to revive him. It was a massive coronary. I saw all the signs and went running for a medicine kit for the drugs I had brought for an emergency. Why I had packed that particular medicine I will never know, but it was there. He was in terrible pain, pain so severe that he could barely speak. I held him in my arms, feeling in a crazy way that I could give him some of my own life and energy.

What can people do in such moments? He looked into my eyes with that look that has been with me and will be, the rest of my life. He said *"The body invents a way to go. Alice, do not fear."*

"You can't die – you can't die and leave me," I argued, cried and begged and finally in despair rocked back and forth like a madwoman on the edge of his cot. Inadequacy is the worst thing of all. One or two hours went by – I don't really know. I sent Balaji for Amar Singh – the man who worked as a servant there during the day. Balaji said he had called him, but I knew in my mind he had not – he had felt it better not to disturb him in the night. I went running off down the path of the compound screaming for Amar Singh all the way. I decided to try to get Rama to Delhi and I needed someone to show me the way. I did not speak the language there at all, nor could I read the signs even if I got to the main road. I knew Amar Singh was a bright man and between us, some way, we could communicate. I said, *"Delhi, Delhi"*, and then *"Rama, Rama,"* and clutching my heart tried to make him understand what had happened. He did, and we went at once to carry Rama to Dr. Chandratraya's car, and fixing a bed of sorts in the back we started off in the night. I drove through the jungles all night, through the winding ways with Amar Singh and I doing our best to see where to go. I came to a town and stopped for water.

•Photo (1) moonlight on the ganges; (2) Rama on the side veranda of Ram Kunj.

I tried to wash Rama's face off a little and he revived slightly. He gasped — *"Do you want me to live so much?"*

I cried, *"Rama, Rama, if you die my life is ended, don't die, you must not die."*

He smiled a little and said very softly, *"Then I will live for a little while yet."*

I rushed back to the driver's seat and continued my mad rush in the night. At 10 a.m., we pulled into Dr. Kelkar's house in Delhi. I ran up the stairs and pounded on the door. Their little boy answered and was shocked to see me. Dr. Kelkar came running and then — of all things — I saw Rama get out of the car and stand up. I yelled wildly to carry him, that he had a heart attack, but Dr. Kelkar thought he had an excited woman on his hands and paid no attention to me. Rama said, *"See that Amar Singh gets some tea."*

They put him in a chair and called a doctor. She came at once and said that he must get to the hospital. We left again in the car and then waited at the hospital door for two hours before anyone would do anything. I thought I would go out of my mind that day trying to get someone to pay attention to my pleas. How American I was; no one hurried like that in India. After many encounters and about six hours later, Rama was given a room and put to bed. Under sedation, he began to muse pleasantly about the things that had happened in the last year while we were together. As he rambled on, I lay on the cot the people had thoughtfully put there for me, and I remember giving him a glance to see if he really breathed, and then I slept.

Next day the sun rose hot and hard. The little room was on a stone balcony. I walked out to see the few sheets and pillow cases being laid out on the grass to dry. Chickens walked around happily and I could see fire smoke starting as people got their morning meals ready. Rama was incoherent; the drugs evidently did their work well. About two or three days passed before I began to get the feeling of night and day. It was a matter of survival: one step at a time; one day at a time.

A boy came to clean the room. He had a pail of filthy water and started to wipe it around the place. I took the rag and water from him, changed it and then started scrubbing the room myself. I suddenly felt good to be doing something — just anything. I looked around and found all the hospital authorities standing in distress watching me. A white woman just does not scrub floors, sweep or clean there. I protested that in my country I did this everyday. There was no shame in it; I wanted to do it. Rama spoke quietly from his bed, *"You are in India now."* I did not clean the floors anymore. The boy they sent kept it shining clean for the peculiar taste of the American.

I lived there in that little hospital with Rama passing in and out of consciousness for about two weeks, I think. I got rather strange. I spoke strangely, and lots of times I would catch myself talking to my sons and thinking that I was in some way hearing their words. Rama became better. His disciples brought food to us and other things that were needed. I think I got pretty bad there for awhile because Dr. Kelkar took me home one night and told me he would stay with Rama for the night. He told me to get some rest and come back in the daytime. The next morning I got a taxi just at dawn. The red sandstone of the Indian Gate gleamed in the sun as we drove under it on the way to the hospital. Things were looking up. The doctors announced that Rama would live.

HOME AGAIN

A letter came. I had been so anxious for my mail. It had been sent from Ram Kunj, but it took awhile to bring it to Delhi. I had looked so long for word from home. It seemed as though some word from there would comfort me so much. I opened the letter. It was from my husband saying that he had stopped loving me. He wanted the children and was suing for divorce immediately. My heart stopped beating – for how long I don't know – and my whole world seemed to fall apart. Rama saw my shock. He grabbed the letter from my hand and seeing what it said, told me that I must return home immediately. We stared at each other, neither one of us being able to speak for a moment. I told him that I could not go now and leave him like this and he said, *"You must. Your children need you."* He called Sanji to take me to the airline office and they prepared an emergency ticket for me. A servant was sent to Ram Kunj for the few things that I wanted to take with me. By the time he returned my papers were in order. I stumbled through my last hours in India. When my clothes came I pulled out some slacks, long wrinkled from disuse, and pulled them on with a cotton shirt. I laid my gold robe aside. My mala hung incongruously over my shirt. Indian friends began to gather and then I left for the hospital to say my last good-bye to my precious guru.

I walked up the terrace steps still in the dream that had begun so long ago. The sweet night smell of India was there. I had packed my clothes with frangipani blossoms and the odor clung to them. Rama mustered his strength and stood next to his bed. I protested, as I knew he was not supposed to move at all, but he said that I should remember him standing, not sick in bed. I had no tears left. We held each other closely and then I left.

Some of Rama's friends and disciples drove me to the airport. There was a small crowd. They hung garlands about my neck and gave me little fans and figs because there was nothing more to say. The plane was late. We all stood silently waiting for an hour or more. No one left me. I felt drugged and in a sleepwalking state. I stood there and tried to think about what was happening. Dr. Kelkar spoke for the people and said that I had been brought to India to save Rama's life. They wished to express their gratitude for the gift of their saint. The words touched me and slid off. I walked out into the night, looked back to wave once, and boarded the plane like a child.

I crossed the world. At each stop, I simply went into an airport and waited for the next plane going my way. I never went to bed or to a hotel anywhere. I can't remember if I ate anything. I remember a bottle of champagne on the plane from Rome to Paris. I had not touched alcohol in so many years, I passed right out. Finally I arrived at Kennedy Airport in New York. I thought then that I should get down and kiss

the ground of the United States in all her glory and plenty. In the phone booth I got in touch with my older son at his high school. I told him where I was, and when I got home he was there to meet the plane. I was in such shock that I took the wrong plane and went to Pittsburgh, so I landed in Cleveland late at night in a cold rain, shortly before Christmas. My sons stood there in the dark, quiet and still, with a letter from their father in their hands. He said he had gone away and the divorce would go through soon.

Later I tried to explain to my husband that we were both victims of this thing that had hit my life – he as much as I – and that it was not my fault. I knew that he wouldn't change his mind; he could not give up everything that made him what he was. He was the only one who recognized the depth of this thing. *"In the world, but not of it"* was not for him. I wondered if it was for me either, but I really never had a choice.

In due time my husband and I were divorced. I can understand his feelings in suing for a separation. Everything an American man lives and works for was threatened by what appeared to him to be an unreasonable and almost blind devotion by his wife to an ancient, Eastern discipline like Yoga. Even though I resisted and tried to throw the impulse out of my life, as I have related in the first part of this book, I was powerless to remove Yoga from my thinking. Unobtrusively, little by little, but inexorably, it moved in to envelop me completely. I really did not have anything to do with it at all, as I have said. My husband – more than anyone else – knew how deep a hold Yoga had on my life, and this he could not accept. He tried his best to motivate me to shake it off. However, his efforts just seemed to drive me deeper and deeper into this thing, which to him was so strange and foreign. I can understand how bewildered one who did not appreciate or have some sympathy for Yoga philosophy would be when his life's partner became as completely obsessed with it, and he wanted a way out.

Thus with his feelings, emotions and judgment molded through ages of ancestry and by the particular environment in his present life, the inevitable was bound to happen, and it did happen – a parting of the ways.

The children and I went on alone that winter. Oddly enough, I had never written a check or paid a bill – I had never even written our Christmas cards before this time, but I seemed to exist somehow. Two days after my return I started to teach my first Yoga student. He asked to be instructed everyday and since that time we have become fast friends. He and his wife have made me feel that their home is another home. My own practices increased. Radio and television shows began to call me. Rama wrote that I should go to Washington to the International Platform Convention there. I wrote back asking, *"Why?"*

He answered, *"All days are good days. Get over your despondency and do as I say."*

Needless to say I went. It was very difficult to be selected for a speaker at that convention. I entered my name to speak on Yoga. I was told there were too many ahead of me who were professional. I waited. Then came a note saying that someone had become ill, and asked if I would speak in his place. I did and was taken on as a lecturer for Program Associates in Utica, New York. Since then I have lectured and taught Yoga, talked Yoga, thought Yoga, breathed Yoga, and I think have become a Yogi. I had followed an Indian Saint, my guru, Rama, across five thousand miles of India and had traveled literally some twenty-five thousand miles around the world. I had traveled by car, rickshaw, horse, train, automobile, and sometimes on foot over hot dusty roads, with a black umbrella held over my head to ward off the scorching sun.

Sometimes now I see gods in my dreams. They are that,

because I write to Rama and he tells me what they are. How would I know? It is not my background. Sometimes the dream of Shiva with his golden arms stretched toward me goes on and on in the night, but I do not fight it anymore. Thou are there – thou art there.

Rama writes me that he is much better. I live to see him here again. When he had a slight relapse, I wrote in terror that he must live. *"You promised me you would live. I hold you to that promise now – would you remove a cake from the oven half-baked?"*

Rama replied: *"Don't worry, the cake will be perfectly done." Om Namah Shivaya.*

Life now has great meaning for me, however; more, I believe, than ever before. I have plumbed depths that I never knew existed. I have made contacts with people who seem divine. I have met kindred souls I know I have been with and loved on journeys through life in the past ages. There is no other explanation for the love, devotion, and understanding that friends have given me.

Sometimes desires dance in the heart like ghosts at midnight. Sleep flees, leaving thoughts and memories. The eternal questions come: *"Who am I? What is life all about? What is the purpose of it? Why am I here?"* Then, as I silently meditate on and on into the night, the feeling of time vanishes, and the *"joy of being"* quietly fills my whole consciousness. I have broken through the iron gates of ordinary existence and my heart is filled with rapture, as all the forces in my body harmonize with cosmic matter. I have more to forget than most people will ever have to remember.

I become a part of everything in the universe with an immense love for people and all things God has created. I am no longer an unimportant speck on the planet Earth, but a vital part in the scheme of endless progress and creation. It's a miracle which was made possible to me only through the teachings and scientific disciplines of Yoga – actually a yoking or union of the mind with God.

I did not consciously seek Yoga; rather, it came to me and completely took control of my whole life and thought. Now Yoga has helped me attain that peace of mind, strength, inspiration, and energy that all of us need for living a full and useful life. Yoga gives assurance and confidence in the trials of life, courage in the hour of danger, comfort in the hours of grief, guidance in everyday concerns, understanding and love for one's fellow man, and finally – a hope of immortality.

This line from the Bhagavad-Gita describes it perfectly, *"like poison in the beginning . . . but like nectar in the end."*



A letter from Swami Rama to a disciple.

THE WORLD...A FANCY TREE

Eternal Love in Rama's dear friend,

Rama received your kind and sweet letter. It was quite refreshing. You have put forth your ripples of doubts in a very intelligent and logical way against the proposition that, *"The world offers you anything you wish for."* It is indeed an index of your penetrating intellect. However, if you think a little deeper and enter into the crystal clear recess of your mind and try to probe into the real nature of the world, then all your doubts will be cleared and you will appreciate that the world is like a very magnificent tree yielding any fruit one wishes for. With the divine light from the omniscient Almighty, Rama will try his best to remove your doubts in the following lines.

First let us try to understand what this world is. The word, "samsar" in Sanskrit is derived from the word "Sri," to move, to change, to make progress. It means that "which changes from time to time, that which assumes different forms or that which is advancing, in the world." It is seen to be divided into four categories – germinated by sweat; oviparous; produced from soil and viviparous. Right from the initial stage every object is in a process of continuous change in form and state; it follows the path of evolution and reaches the stage of a human being. Wherever there is a phenomenon of change in place and form there exists the world. In short, the world consists of five basic elements. Rama considers it to be a very mistaken notion that one who leaves his house severing all his connections with his relatives and friends and shuns society goes beyond and out of the world. So long as man does not completely surrender and become one with God, who is without a second, indivisible, unmanifest, omniscient, omnipotent, all joyful and immortal, neither does he abandon the world nor does the world betray him. "The world", "the cosmos" and "life" are all synonymous. The great teacher Shankaracharya has explained the theory of creation of world thus: *"The inspired desire is the cause of creation of the entire world."* The Upanishads also declare the same way, *"He desired to become manifold and He multiplied."* Thus, by His wishful thinking the world arose.

Conceiving ideas and counter ideas are the functions of mind. Shri Gaudapadacharya, the teacher of Shankaracharya, in his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad has clearly expounded this theory that the entire visible world consisting of all movable and immovable objects is the projection of mind. We also realize by our experience that one whose mind swings like a pendulum between two opposite ideas becomes a prey of the dual forces of pleasure and pain and of the like. That is "world". On the other hand, he whose mind is completely one with the serene ultimate Reality, even though he does all his worldly activities in a routine manner transcends the planes of dualities like happiness and sorrow. Let that be.

Every human being has, and lives in, his own world – excellent, ordinary or neither, depending upon the imaginative power of the mind which in turn is governed by his past actions, experiences and the blend of three qualities – noble, active and ignorant.

Mind is the motive force of all human activities; they are all guided by the inspiration of mind. The labyrinth of human



• Rama at The Light of Yoga Society, 1972.

activities spun out of imagination of mind extends far and wide covering the entire cosmos of fourteen spheres. It is all confounding and perplexing. It is therefore likened to a massive tree with innumerable branches stemming out from one single root. Hence the simile of a tree to the world. In this way the world-tree is created out of imagination and desires. Not only that, it is sustained as well as maintained by them only. Finally it gets submerged in them. Therefore, what is wrong in calling the world a fancy-tree? The Sanskrit word "Kalpa" means to think, conceive, understand or meditate and the world's existence, subsistence and destruction depend upon thoughts, desires and actions. Therefore, in a true sense the world is a "Kalpa-tree".

The characteristic of a "Kalpa-tree" is to offer the desired fruit. As any one sitting underneath this tree spins out good or bad thoughts, so he enjoys the desired fruits. There is no end to man's desires and daydreams. In one breath man conceives two ideas, one while taking in breath and the other in exhaling it. A person with a healthy mind and body breathes 15 times a minute. In other words, he conceives 30 ideas during that short interval of a minute. A weak person on the other hand breathes 20 to 25 times in a minute, sometimes even more, with the result that in a minute his idle dreaming covers the range of 40, 50 or even 60 ideas. The more ideas that are conceived, the lesser is their power of fulfillment; conversely the fewer ideas the mind lingers over for a comparatively longer time, these ideas get surcharged more effectively with the mind's force. This force is called will-power. In fact, all the objects that we see in the world are the outcome of the fulfillment of some desire, and the result depends upon the will-power translating the desire. Whatever desires and hopes man entertains, they are all fulfilled under the "Kalpa-tree" of this world,\ but it takes time and therefore he has to take several births for their fulfillment and unless all his desires are fulfilled there is no escape from fear and death, nor is there liberation.

•Photo (1) Rama in Ram Kunj.

One who practices Yoga and Pranayama exercises can stop breathing for nearly 15 minutes, i.e., in one breath of 15 to 20 minutes he can concentrate on one single thought or desire. That is why his desires are stronger and more forceful than those of an ordinary individual. They are therefore, quickly fulfilled.

A devotee or a seeker of knowledge of Reality concentrates on one name, mantra, or thought. Therefore, with all his breath one single-pointed thought is associated. His concentrating habit enables his mind to dwell upon one single thought for a fairly long time and that is the secret of its fulfillment. Thus, following the path of japa, concentration, meditation, Yoga, etc. man is capable of fulfilling all his

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desires more rapidly and attaining the state of liberation quickly.

Man makes hectic efforts in running after happiness but his conception of happiness goes on changing. Therefore, from the desire of yesterday, by the time it is fulfilled, due to flux of time his concept of happiness has changed, and he fails to derive any happiness even if it is fulfilled. On the other hand, he experiences sorrow. Even otherwise, the happiness that he experiences is always short-lived and delusive because of the limitations and deteriorating nature of the sense organs with which he appears to enjoy happiness. Therefore, it is impossible for anyone to enjoy everlasting, unalloyed and complete happiness unless he is able to be one with that object which is permanent, homogeneous and capable of giving enduring happiness. Man's wishful thinking and efforts to acquire perishable and ever-changing objects lead him to grief instead of happiness. Thus, on his own wishing he invites sorrow and grief. Due to sheer ignorance of The Supreme Reality his range of desire does not encompass within itself the true desire of gaining the grace of that Supreme Reality which is the abode and source of permanent and intransient Bliss. On the other hand, sitting under the shade of "the fancy tree" he goes on imagining and desiring all sorts of things, and, even though, according to his supplication, those desires are fulfilled, he experiences sorrow in their enjoyment. In this world, the majority of people are thus found engrossed in self-inviting sorrowful activities. They desire sorrow and lo! it follows. Based on such experiences and examples the saints have aphoristically declared, *"In this world pleasure and pain are comparable to a small grain and a mountain respectively."*

The personal world of man consists of his own thoughts, ideas, his environment and his familiar faces and forms. The resultant response of the world is considered to be favorable or unfavorable according to its positive or negative contribution in fulfilling his desires. The wider and more expansive the personal world is, the greater are the obstacles, hurdles, and difficulties in accomplishing his desires. This is but natural because the desire-bearing tree has to fulfill the desires of everybody and as no two individuals' desires are harmonious, there is a clash in their fulfillment.

In the political field people have rivals and, therefore, they meet with obstacles in fulfilling their desire to serve their motherland. Thus, the life-missions of great leaders like Napoleon, Sikandar, Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, etc., while playing their role under the shade of the "Kalpa tree" remained unfulfilled. For this very reason, a "Yogi", a devotee, or a seeker of truth retires to a secluded place and practices making his will-power strong. In that environment he practically encounters no rivals; even if there are few, their will-power is feeble and hence ineffective in its impact. Therefore, we see that desires of such great men are easily fulfilled and their life becomes a Kingdom of Bliss. We often see that if we plant 100 to 200 saplings in a small place then not even one of them either takes root or flourishes to its full measure, but if we remove some of them and retain only a few they grow luxuriously. The same is the case with man's desires. If he nourishes a very few desires in the recess of his mind then within a short time all of them will certainly get fulfilled, provided, of course, at the same time there are no opposite or rival desires from any other quarter or that their force is feeble to obstruct the progress.

In this world from all quarters there is an incessant clamour for worldly things, like wealth, power, honour and such other things of enjoyment. But the fun of it is one man's meat while being another man's poison and what is happiness for one is sorrow for another. Therefore, under the "Kalpa tree" people start wishing, begging and supplicating for mutually conflicting things. There ensues a heavy downpour of such a jumble of things from this "Kalpa tree". Therefore, practically to everyone's lot fall disappointment, pain, sorrow and jealousy. Even

then man gets here and there some stray particles of happiness and that sustains him in his life. Otherwise, everyone would have considered this life as not worth living and committed suicide. The fact that all do not commit suicide is the positive proof that they entertain hope of pleasure and to a certain extent their hopes are fulfilled. From the above analysis, it is thus clear that if we desire for such a thing in the enjoyment of which there will be no obstacles from any quarters, our unopposed desire will be fulfilled early. There is only one such object, viz., God; and if our desire has reached a saturation point there will be no delay in our fulfillment, but, here too, our own unfulfilled desires of past several births lying latent in our heart chase us with opposition and for this reason we have to remain for days, years, nay even births together unsatisfied due to failure. Those who are uneducated and addicted to vices have less capacity of rational thinking but they are very adamant in their convictions. Once they take a fancy for anything they have extraordinary power of holding fast to it. Due to their dogged pursuance even their stupid desires get an edge and that is why we notice them amassing great fortune, gaining popularity and possessing such other sources of happiness. People may think them happy but in reality they are very miserable. Rama has seen several such instances. Quite a number of Rama's friends are rolling in wealth and are at the pinnacle of power. Rama has lived with them and has closely observed them. They are full of worries. Rama really takes pity on them. Those who are cultured, thoughtful and follow the righteous path are ever willing to forgo their happiness to make others happy, but they have one weakness in them. It is this, that though some thought or desire for pleasure springs in their mind, their intellectual faculty at once makes them realize the trifling value of pleasure; hence their desire never gains sharpness of pursuit. Their minds vacillate, lacking the fixity of purpose. Their efforts are therefore, half-hearted and consequently they also fail in their achievements.

Today what we call luck or unforeseen destiny is nothing but the storehouse of results of past efforts and deliberate actions. There are various shades of actions. They are either on physical, mental or subtler planes of being. We see a labourer working for twelve hours with his spade and hammer, but he is unable to put in even an hour's intellectual work. Not only that, he won't be able to express coherently whatever comes to mind. This is because, though in the usual course of evolution he appears in the form of a human being, he is still at the lowest rung of the ladder, having just crossed the border of animal life; he therefore retains expressively most of the animal traits. Like an animal he is able to put in hard physical labor, but his intellectual capacity remains low. Due to feeble thought-force and weak will-power he is unable to make his life happy. On the other hand, there are others who are very practical and calculating. For hours and days together they are found engrossed in thinking. They appear to be still and doing nothing. Many people call them lazy and good-for-nothing, but in reality they are not so. They always prove successful in attaining happiness because their efforts are very subtle and effective, guided as they are by rational and strong will-power. Therefore, the lower class people start agitating against the latter class of people complaining, *"See, how these persons who are indolent and good-for-nothing have at their beck and call all means of enjoyment, whereas we sweating and panting under the load of work do not get even an iota of happiness!"*

It is the nature of the "Kalpa tree" to offer good or bad fruit as one desires. The majority of people, either due to ignorance or for want of proper understanding of real happiness, mistake sorrow for happiness and wish for it; naturally the "Kalpa tree" offers it with pleasure. In this happening what is the mistake of the "Kalpa tree"? In this way, if due to our ignorance most of us desire for sorrow and come to grief, what is the propriety of blaming the desire-bearing na-

ture of the "Kalpa-tree"? The real issue is not whether there is more happiness or sorrow in the world but whether it offers fulfillment of our desires or not.

Shri Ramdas and other saints have correctly diagnosed the causes of sufferings. They explain that there is a very wide net of enticing objects in the world and mistaking these objects as a source of real pleasure man craves for their acquisition and the world-tree, as its nature is, sooner or later satisfies his desires. After the first flush of joy, his interest in those objects wanes. He, therefore, turns his back upon them and goes in quest of fresh woods and pastures new. He thus goes on running after the mirage of alluring objects. In this way – either on account of his own experiences in innumerable births or having fortunately obtained the favor of some saints, when man ultimately realizes painful consequences of all material and perishable objects of the world – he launches on the discovery of such an object which is unlike other worldly objects. He gets convinced that there is one, The Atman, which is Pure Knowledge and source of Eternal Happiness. Having found the right clue, his desire to attain that object becomes so strong and sublime that this world, which is befittingly called a desire - bearing tree, fulfills his desire in attaining it. Thus we as gardeners nurture the world-tree and make it yield poisonous or sweet fruits. If we desire to obtain eternal happiness and work for it then the world turns into a happiness-bearing tree. On the contrary if we entertain satanic desires and act accordingly this very world becomes a veritable hell.

By running away from the world, we do not quit or go beyond it. In fact, this world is created by and sustained on selfish and clinging desires and longings. If man surrenders himself and becomes one with that indivisible, imperishable, unthinkable and omniscient God and acts in the world selflessly and fearlessly his life is bound to become peaceful and happy – the summum bonum of existence. It is such a person who could be said to have truly given up the world. For him, in spite of himself being in the world, it ceases to exist. In the Divine Song of the Bhagavad-Gita Lord Shri Krishna says, *"Of thousands of men some rare soul strives to realize me; of these striving Yogis, again, some rare one (devoting himself exclusively to Me) knows me in reality."* (Chapter VII, Verse 3).

The majestic world-tree stands on the substratum of imagination, wishes and desires. The moment the foundation is removed, it will fall down with a bang. The problem therefore, is how to eliminate desires. The philosophical treatises and scientific literature on Knowledge of the Self, like the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads come to our rescue. They teach us the technique of how to extricate ourselves from the infestation of desires and turn our grief-ridden life into a blissful one. Many people imagine that worldly life and spiritual life do not go hand in hand. In reality it is not so. This very worldly life transcends into a spiritual one, once the human activities untainted by selfishness or attachment become natural and inspired by God. However, to bring about that change in human activities it is very essential to discipline the mind and the sense-organs through Hatha, Mantra, Laya and Raja Yoga. Once these are properly trained and disciplined then all activities go on smoothly like a machine. In such a state the desires which spring up in the mind and feed the sense organs no longer remain human desires. They become the desires of God only. Hence the fruition of such desire is never harmful. On the other hand, it helps in attaining happiness. In the Bhagavad-Gita one such path leading to this goal is explained:

"Completely giving up all desires arising from thoughts of the world, and fully restraining the senses from all sides, by the mind, man should through gradual practice attain tranquility; having established the mind in God through reason controlled by steadfastness, he should not think of anything else. Who is thus identified with

God gains Supreme Happiness." (Bhagavad-Gita, VI, 24, 25 and 27).

By following these instructions man can destroy the cancerous and diseased branches of the world-tree and having gained the true knowledge of the Self he can properly nourish the world-tree and enjoy the fruits of his efforts in gaining unalloyed happiness, lasting peace and uninterrupted joy.

Fate, destiny or luck are all the outcome of some past actions. Some positive action of the past becomes today's destiny. One thing to bear in mind is, the doer of the action alone and no one else has to enjoy or suffer its consequences. Due to ignorance or long passage of our worldly existence in several births, though in our causal body all our actions are minutely and subtly recorded, we either fail to comprehend them or forget them altogether. However, according to Law of Nature, when the "Fancy Tree" of the world yields sweet or bitter fruit in fulfillment of our past actions, we simply feel bewildered. We begin to wonder when we see a good-for-nothing fellow rolling in wealth hardly realizing that he is enjoying the fruit of his past actions done in pursuit of wealth. There is nothing inexplicable in such illustrations. Don't we come across a person, who after putting in 25 to 30 years of service retires and enjoys pension! He is not then required to do any work to get his pension; similarly, while in service during earned or casual leave, a person gets his pay without attending to his job. If someone sees him in a holiday mood and draws a hasty conclusion that this person is getting salary without doing anything, his cursory observation about that person would be obviously wrong; because the person who thus gets pension or salary gets it as a matter of right on account of rendering past service. So too, when someone enjoys happiness, it is the reward for past good actions. However, the credit balance of good actions goes on diminishing and in case he wants more and more happiness he should ensure that this balance never gets exhausted. The

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• Photo (1) Swami Rama in his early twenties after completing 21 days complete fast at Durganag Temple, Srinagar, Kashmir, 6th of November 1933. (10 years after taking Sannyas and entering the Himalayas; (2) a favorite photo of Swami Rama.

banker of all bankers is God only. Increase your credit-worthiness with Him only by complete surrender to Him. Rama has tried to dispel your doubts and it is hoped that by pondering over these ideas again and again you will feel enlightened.

The world is not wanting in reckless, violent and slanderous types of people. But those who are keen to obtain Pure Knowledge, or those who are Yogis or follow the devotional path do not forsake the world on that score. They initially fail to understand the technique to be followed while acting in the world so that their actions are not harmful either to others or to themselves. To learn this discipline and master the technique, they choose their own university in some secluded corner of the world and on successful completion of their course come out and fearlessly plunge in the arena of life and become the saviours of many. During their preparatory period these people remain away from the world. This absence of these people from, and complete cessation of contact with the society is wrongly taken as abandonment of the world. The period of learning varies from student to student. In some cases it may be even indefinite.

In every object of name and form Rama sees a flash of divine principle. Therefore, on account of the divine nucleus in every object Rama considers it his duty to treat everybody and everything with due reverence. Even our social etiquettes demand that we should treat everybody with respect. By being informal or by addressing a person by his first name or nickname we do not necessarily develop love and affection, by making such a show, nor do we eliminate our ego.

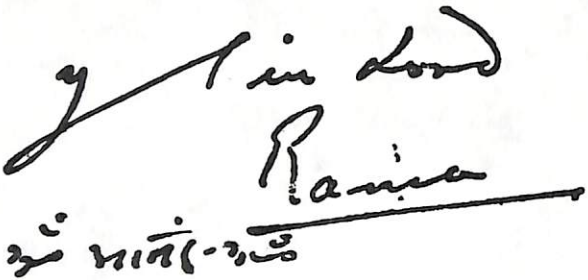
Man always likes flattery and praise. He feels elated if he is treated like a very important personality. This is because his inner-self, the Atman, is Supreme; second to none and endowed with superb qualities. He commands that honor and praise. However, due to sheer ignorance man fails to realize his own value. Even then, he has a natural liking for

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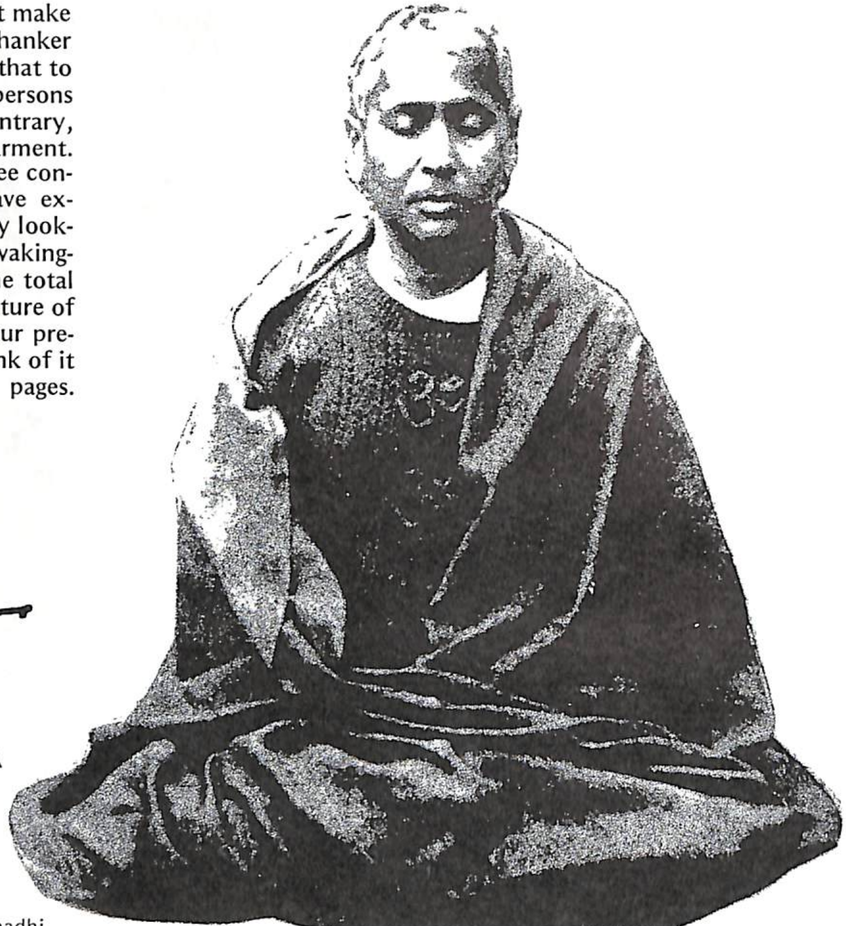


honor and praise. But while enjoying that he should not make a show that he has no ego. No doubt, man should not hanker after praise and flattery for himself, but if anyone does that to please him, one should not feel annoyed. Addressing persons with respect does not indicate unfamiliarity. On the contrary, it is an indication of oneness and expression of endearment.

Everybody's world is three-fold depending upon three conditions — waking, dreaming and deep sleep. You have expressed your opinions and narrated your experiences by looking at the mirror of the physical world of your own waking-condition only. This is only a fragmentary facet of the total world. However, if you minutely investigate into the nature of the total world, Rama is sure that you will change your previous opinion. You will then undoubtedly come to think of it as a real "Fancy Tree" delineated in the foregoing pages.



Yours in Lord,
SWAMI RAMA



•Photo (1) Swami Rama in Samadhi.

THE FORMATION OF THE LIGHT OF YOGA SOCIETY

By David Rankin

I first met Alice in the fall of 1967. I had just graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art and was struggling to get adjusted to the working world. I had been actively involved in drugs, political and social change as well as a host of rather personally destructive habits such as smoking 4 packs of cigarettes a day and a diet that consisted mostly of "junk food." I had been interested in Yoga and Eastern thinking for several months before graduation due to several, of what to me were at the time, extraordinary experiences that were a direct result of my injestion of various hallucinogenic drugs. Although my involvement in the drug experience opened my mind to multiple levels of consciousness it did not supply the necessary discipline and personal control that I needed to make use of such experience. In fact, I paid dearly for this new view of life, for the drugs had systematically destroyed my concentration, will-power, and true creativity. In effect, these had been replaced by a jello-like feeling of "just grooving" along living. I lost my scholarship in art school, my communication and understanding with my family, and my inner drive for realization had been thoroughly destroyed by a lackadaisical attitude of complacency and some obscure childish idea of "this is my karma". We had a slang word to describe people like me – "burned out."

In this condition I met Alice Christensen through the timely help of two of her students who were friends of mine. My first experience with Alice was in a small meeting room in a tiny firehouse in Mentor-on-the-Lake, Ohio, where I joined a class of hers. I had read several books about Eastern "Gurus" but I was not prepared for Alice. I admit I was extremely skeptical that anyone named Alice could possibly teach me anything about Yoga. Now if she had been called "Urahaturiya Mokohanandiji Maharaji devi" I would have taken it for granted that she was an "enlightened being" and surrendered completely; but "Alice"? In retrospect it was this very thing that began to make the most lasting impression on me for I discovered that Alice did have a Yogic name – Rama Devi – given to her by her Guru, Swami Rama. When I asked her why she didn't go by her Indian name she replied "All these Indian names confuse Americans. What we want to do is look a little deeper . . . don't get hung up in the names. To my Guru, I am Rama Devi . . to you people here, just call me Alice and let's not waste time deciphering titles and names." For some reason that made a great deal of sense to me and it makes more sense daily as I see so many spiritual aspirants who truly believe that if they change their name to an Indian one it will lead them to realization faster. Swami Rama also told me " Don't worry about shaving your head, wearing orange robes and changing your name . . . transform your heart and mind, this is where Yoga is done."

Alice's thinking, her style of dressing and acting were all very American. I had expected her to tap me on the heart chakra or roll her eyes up in her head and go into a "mystic trance", but instead she was completely "normal". I soon discovered though that Alice was simply on a different wave length and she didn't feel any necessity to change all her outward appearances. She told a story once about two great Yogis. "The one said to the other 'I have lived so many aeons of time I'm going to get rid of this body and merge in the Absolute. . ', the other replied "Is the Absolute any different from this world, have you not seen the unity in all this diversity . . . is there any longer life or death for you.' 'Yes, I have realized this' the first remarked. Again the second replied, 'Then if there is no difference in your mind and heart what need have you any longer for changing appearances.' "

Those first few months in class with Alice were the beginning of a new life for me. Her methods and manner seemed so normal, so natural, and she used to say over and over "I'm not asking you to give anything up . . what is not good for you, you will let go of naturally at the right time, so don't strain and worry." Within 1½ months I let go of drugs, poor work habits, negativity, depression, boredom, and mental vacillation. I gave up smoking in one day and never was bothered by withdrawal at all. I switched to a vegetarian diet, studied nutrition feverishly at Alice's insistence and improved my diet 1000%. In fact so much of me changed so quickly and so completely that I became rather blissfully disoriented even though my work habits had become superb and my concentration was increasing rapidly. This, coupled with the new health and force I felt growing within me allowed me to work circles around my peers with even less effort than before.

My dream world changed completely and took on a Cecil B. DeMille character that lasted nearly a year. Alice began appearing in my dreams regularly, guiding, soothing, directing, and redirecting my anxieties, fears, weaknesses, and a hitherto unknown, unimaginable experience of the heart began to well up from within as though a doorway to vast, unlimited dimension had somehow opened in my chest. Bits and pieces of Alice's life began to filter through her close students, of which there were about two dozen. She taught and worked long hours, driving thousands of miles a week and making barely enough to feed her and her son, Eric. Her husband had left her it seems because of her involvement with Yoga and various Gurus, etc. I found this to be amazing that this would cause the separation of two people. It astounded me and drew me even closer to this woman who was having such a profound effect on my life.

One night after class Alice told us "you know if we all go together we can bring my Guru, Rama, over here and you can have a chance to meet a real master, a real Yogi." 2½ months later there we were standing at gate no. 1 at Cleveland Hopkins Airport watching this little, golden brown man named Rama wearing a Kashmiri bathrobe get off the plane. He was much smaller than I had expected, but very handsome. It was his eyes though that drew me. They were so intense and deep and to my amazement, they had the same exact look in them that Alice's had. They both had that same rather timeless vastness that was strangely inviting and deep. He walked as though he inately knew where each step was going before it touched the ground and for me that was the beginning of The Light of Yoga Society that spring and summer of 1968.

Rama stayed in Alice's little cottage that summer and several of us camped in her backyard in a tent. Those days are like a tiny box of jewels to me now. Rama and Alice travelled around quite a bit of lecturing, visiting students and appearing on television and radio. A close group of students began to emerge out of the hundreds that came and went that summer and they began to develop and intensify their practices under Alice's and Rama's watchful eyes. I began to see how similar Alice and Rama were. Rama had that same understated quality, as though he were disguising something. He seemed so normal to me that I often took his presence for granted. One day I was sitting on the porch, just daydreaming and staring off into space, indulging in a little mental "fuzz" when all of a sudden Rama's voice from the other room yelled, "Mr. David . . don't let your mind relax into that obscurity . . . do your mantra." Rama's mind didn't allow an inch of deviation. I was often rudely brought back to the path by him that summer, especially when he curtly exclaimed, "Is that all you think about, junk and nonsense, everything you say is meaningless, idle prattle — you'd be better off not speaking at all." These blows to my ego were painful, but they forced me to take a stand and grow.



Rama began to talk of Alice as his "voice of Yoga in the West" and he seemed both remote and distant, yet close and intimate at the same time. Before the next summer, when Rama returned to the United States, The Light of Yoga Society was underway. He returned every spring for the next four years and the number of students grew beyond capacity. The close group of students began to pitch in and help handle the work. A group of us accompanied Alice to Swami Rama's ashram at Saptasarovar just north of Haridwar in 1970. My first experience of India was overwhelming. Alice and I had grown very close in the past couple of years. I was trying to take much of the nuts and bolts responsibility off her shoulders and keep her from over-extending her energies so as to preserve her health the same as she was doing for Rama. With Rama's hearty consent and blessings, he allowed us to marry on the way home that year, and before we left India he told us, "Now you must establish a solid foundation from which to build upon. Don't make it easy for them (her students); set up a standard and force them to come up to it." He told me several times, "Now draw in a tight circle of well-trained students around Her and everything will come up nicely."

Within six months of this conversation, we had moved from Mentor into a large house in Cleveland Heights. Large numbers of practicing students moved into the area, and Rama again returned to the U.S. There were so many students who wanted to be around Rama that that summer the house was always overflowing with people. We would have 25-30 people for breakfast, 60-100 for afternoon tea and 25-30 for dinner practically every day for five months. The workload was tremendous, just handling all those people and their often conflicting personalities, but somehow it all worked. Swamiji (Rama) performed the first of two fire ceremonies that summer. These were a sort of mass initiation for establishing the LYS and its work, and I was thrilled to be a part of it.

The LYS rapidly took shape with Rama's brilliance and Alice's practicality. A strong group of Yogis and Yoginis were training to teach, and the teaching load was increasing geometrically as the desire for competent, quality instruction grew in the area. We all redoubled our efforts and each of us developed our own innate capacity for specific areas of the work. In the spring of 1971, we received our non-profit tax-exempt status from the IRS. We were and are very proud of this as we were one of the first to receive this classification on the merits of Yoga alone. Many other organizations had gone in as religious organizations or under the corporate umbrella of a university, but we did it purely on the basis of Yoga.

Rama told Alice and me at tea one day, "The first thing to do is change the universal mind force of this area, the causal mind of the city; then the spiritual atmosphere will allow the growth of many other things." He had already set about doing this silently in his own masterful way. "Cleveland will someday be a spiritual hub, fostering many various ways," he used to say. And that has materialized for Cleveland in the past few years as it has begun to change both spiritually and physically.

He died in the Cleveland area in 1972. Yogis call this Mahasamadhi. This was a great blow to Alice and me and all of her students and friends. However, as Rama had told Alice and me so many times, "Why do you make such a fuss over this body . . . it is just a nuisance to me. I have to drag it about from here to there at great cost of money and energy. Alice, I will be ten thousand times more useful to you after this body drops off. Just think of me Alice and I will be there, know this for certain." In 1972, barely one month before his death, Rama made a transferance of power to Alice and he told her, "Now, Alice . . . you are the Guru . . . you are ready now to move fully into this career." This conversation took place on Guru Purnama Day. Another conversation also reemphasized her role. However, no one including Alice knew of Rama's ap-

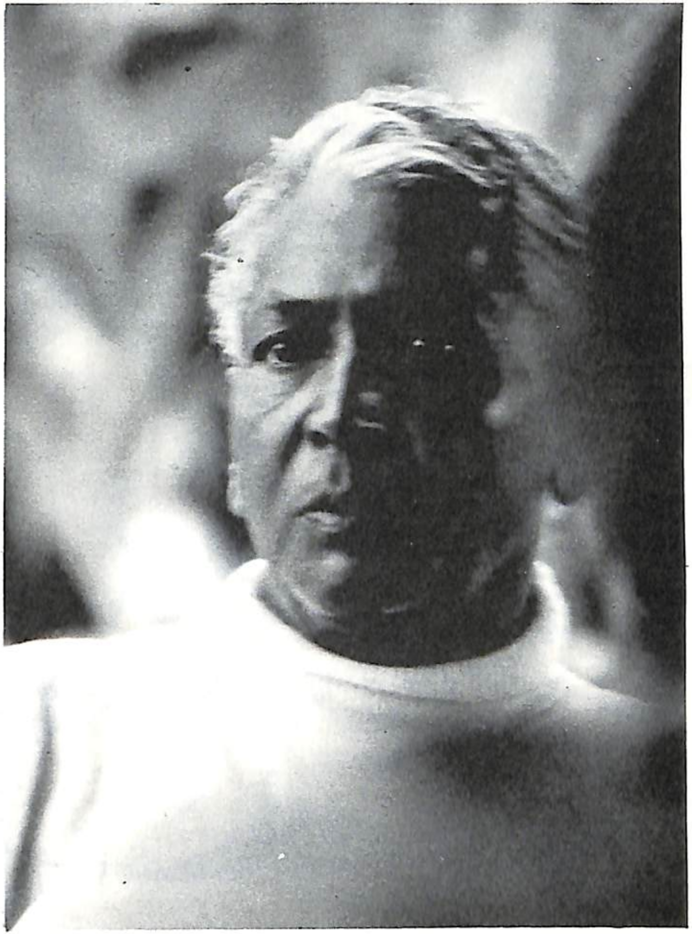
proaching death. Yet on September 25, 1972, he left his mortal frame just as he had told Alice years before, "It will happen quickly and in a moment I'll be gone."

Since that day the work of the LYS has grown and expanded from Cleveland Heights to Florida, where we opened another Ashram and Center in Sarasota; another in Srinagar, Kashmir and another in Dharwar, Mysore State, India. The LYS now teaches hundreds of people per month. We give free lecture demonstrations to thousands of people yearly, handing out free teaching brochures by the thousands. We have developed Yoga programs for the elderly, for children, for beginners and advanced students from all walks of life and all ages. We are also teaching thousands of Indian students which is a strange twist of fate: that an American would be bringing Yoga back to India. Under Alice's firm, steady guidance and Rama's bountiful grace, the LYS is actively presenting this ancient Yoga to people of all religions and backgrounds.

It seems like a hundred years ago that I first glimpsed Alice in that tiny firehouse in Mentor, and it's nearly 25 years ago that Alice was awakened in the night by the blazing "Light of Yoga" which transformed her into one of the finest Yogis in the world. Alice did not seek Yoga, but rather it sought her. Her Guru Rama has set all of our feet firmly on the path, and I am eternlly grateful to Alice and to her Guru Swami Rama and the Light of Yoga for making all this possible.

May the Light of Yoga illumine your life also.

David Rankin





The lives and experiences of Yogis are always thrilling and inspiring because of their illuminating effect. What an individual man or woman achieves in increasing consciousness uplifts all other beings. The Light of Yoga Society Guru Alice Christensen is a fascinating example of the power of Yoga. Her Yogic endeavors began in the early 1950's in what was then the desert of mysticism, the American Midwest. Great Yogis such as Babaji and Swami Sivananda appeared to her countless times to instruct her in the Yoga practices which eventually led her to her Guru, Swami Rama of Kashmir and Saptasarovar, India. What Alice has attained through Yoga is a victory not only for herself, but for all people struggling to understand themselves and gain enlightenment. Since her initial experience of "**light**" nearly 25 years ago, Alice has evolved into one of the world's foremost Yogis. This book is the intimate diary of the early years which began when the **Light of Yoga** burst forth.

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